AN

ESSAY

ON

CRITICISM.

Written in the Year MDCCIX.

by Alexander Pope

With the COMMENTARY and NOTES of

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

THE

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ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

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AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

'TIS hard to ſay, if greater want of ſkill
Appear in writing or in judging ill;
But, of the two, leſs dang'rous is th' offence
To tire our patience, than miſlead our ſenſe.

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An Eſſay] The Poem is in one book, but divided into three principal *parts* or members. The firſt [to ℣ 203.] gives rules for the *Study of the Art of Criticiſm:* the ſecond [from thence to ℣ 562.) expoſes the *Cauſes of wrong Judgment:* and the third [from thence to the end] preſcribes the *Morals of the Critic.*

In order to a right underſtanding of this poem, it will be neceſſary to obſerve, that tho' it be intitled ſimply *an Eſſay on Criticiſm*, yet ſeveral of the precepts relate equally to the good *writing* as well as to the true *judging* of a poem. This is ſo far from violating the *Unity* of the Subject that it rounds and compleats it: Or from diſordering the regularity of the *Form*, that it produces the higheſt beauty which can ariſe out of method, as will appear from the following conſiderations: 1. It was impoſſible to give a full and exact idea of the *Art of poetical Criticiſm*, without conſidering, at the ſame time, the *Art of Poetry*; ſo far as Poetry is an *Art*. Theſe therefore being cloſely connected in nature, the Author has judiciouſly interwoven the precepts of

Some few in that, but numbers err in this,
Ten cenſure wrong for one who writes amiſs;
A fool might once himſelf alone expoſe,
Now one in verſe makes many more in proſe.
'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go juſt alike, yet each believes his own.

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both reciprocally thro' his whole poem. 2. As all the rules of the ancient Critics were taken from Poets, who copied nature, there is a double reaſon why every Poet ſhould be a Critic: Therefore, as the ſubject is poetical Criticiſm, it is frequently addreſſed to the critical Poet. And thirdly, the Art of Criticiſm is as neceſſarily, and much more uſefully exerciſed in *writing* than in *judging*.

But men have been miſled by the modeſty of the *Title:* which only promiſes an Art of *Criticiſm*, in a treatiſe, and that a compleat one, of the Art both of *Criticiſm and Poetry*. This, and the not attending to the conſiderations offered above, perhaps was what miſled a very candid writer, after having given this Piece all the praiſes on the ſide of genius and poetry which his true taſte could not refuſe it, to ſay, that *the obſervations follow one another like thoſe in* Horace's Art of Poetry, *without that methodical regularity which would have been requiſite in a proſe writer*. Spec. N° 235. Whereas nothing can be more unlike, in this reſpect, than theſe two poems: The *Eſſay on Criticiſm*, having, as we ſhall ſhew, all the regularity that *Method* can demand, and the *Art of Poetry* all the looſeneſs and inconnection that a familiar converſation would indulge. Neither (were it otherwiſe) would this excellent author's obſervation excuſe our poet; who, writing in the formal way of a diſcourſe, was obliged to obſerve the method of ſuch compoſitions; while *Horace* in an eaſy epiſtle needed no apology for want of it. For 'tis the *nature* of the compoſition, that makes *Method* proper or unneceſſary.

VER. 1. *'Tis hard to ſay, &c.*] The Poem opens [from ℣ 1 to 9.] with ſhewing the uſe and ſeaſonableneſs of the ſubject. Its *uſe*, from the greater miſchief in wrong Criticiſm than in bad Poetry, this only tiring, that miſleading the reader: Its *ſeaſonableneſs*, from the growing number of falſe Critics, which now vaſtly exceed that of ill Poets.

VER. 9. *'Tis with our judgments, &c.*] The author having ſhewn us the expediency of his ſubject, the Art of *Criticiſm*, next inquires [from ℣ 8 to 15] into the neceſſary *Qualities* of a *true Critic:* And obſerves firſt, that JUDGMENT, ſimply and alone, is not ſufficient to conſtitute this character, becauſe *Judgment*, like the *artificial meaſures of Time*, goes different, and yet each relies upon his own. The reaſon is

In Poets as true genius is but rare,
True Taſte as ſeldom is the Critic's ſhare;
Both muſt alike from Heav'n derive their light,
Theſe born to judge, as well as thoſe to write.
Let ſuch teach others who themſelves excel,
And cenſure freely who have written well.

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concluſive; and the ſimilitude extremely juſt. For *Judgment*, when alone, is always regulated, or at leaſt much influenced by *cuſtom*, *faſhion*, and *habit*; and never certain and conſtant but when founded upon TASTE: Which is the ſame in the Critic, as GENIUS in the Poet: both are derived from Heaven, and like the ſun (the *natural meaſure of Time*) always conſtant and equal.

Nor need we wonder that Judgment alone will not make a Critic in poetry, when we ſee that it will not make a Poet. And on examination we ſhall find, that *Genius* and *Taſte* are but one and the ſame faculty, differently exerting itſelf under different names, in the two profeſſions of *Poet* and *Critic*. For the Art of Poetry conſiſts in *ſelecting*, out of all thoſe images which preſent themſelves to the fancy, ſuch of them as are truly poetical: And the Art of Criticiſm in judiciouſly diſcerning, and fully reliſhing what it finds ſo ſelected. 'Tis the ſame operation of the mind in both caſes, and conſequently, exerted by the ſame faculty. All the difference is, that in the *Poet* this faculty is eminently joined with a *bright imagination*, and *extenſive comprehenſion*, which provide ſtores for the ſelection, and can form that ſelection by proportioned parts, into a regular whole: In the critic, with a *ſolid judgment* and *accurate diſcernment*; which penetrate into the cauſes of an excellence, and can ſhew that excellence in all variety of lights.

VER. 15. *Let ſuch teach others, &c.*] But it is not enough that the Critic hath theſe *natural endowments* to entitle him to the exerciſe of his Art, he ought to give a further teſt of his qualifications by ſome *acquired talents:* And this on two accounts: 1. Becauſe the office of a Critic is an exerciſe of Authority. 2. Becauſe he being naturally as partial to his *Judgment* as the Poet is to his *Wit*, his partiality would have nothing to correct it, as that of the perſon judged hath. Therefore ſome teſt is reaſonable; and the moſt unexceptionable is his having

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VER. 15. *Let ſuch teach others*] *Qui ſcribit artificioſe, ab aliis commode ſcripta facile intelligere poterit.* Cic. ad Herenn. lib. 4. *De pictore, ſculptore, fictore, niſi artifex judicare non poteſt.* Pliny.

Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
But are not Critics to their judgment too?
Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind:
Nature affords at least a glimm'ring light;
The lines, tho' touch'd but faintly, are drawn right.
But as the slightest sketch, if justly trac'd,
Is by ill-colouring but the more disgrac'd,
So by false learning is good sense defac'd:

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ving writ well himself, as this is an approved remedy against *Critical partiality*; and the surest means of so maturing the Judgment, as to reap with glory what *Longinus* calls *the last and most perfect fruits of much study and experience.* Η ΓΑΡ ΤΩΝ ΛΟΓΩΝ ΚΡΙΣΙΣ ΠΟΛΛΗΣ ΕΣΤΙ ΠΕΙΡΑΣ ΤΕΛΕΙΤΑΙΟΝ ΕΠΙΓΕΝΝΗΜΑ.

VER. 19. *Yet if we look, &c.*] But having been so free with this fundamental quality of Criticism, *Judgment*, as to charge it with *inconstancy* and *partiality*, and as often warped by *custom* and *affection*; that this may not be mistaken, he next explains [from ℣ 18 to 36.] the nature of *Judgment*, and the accidents occasioning those disorders before objected to it. He owns that the *seeds* of *Judgment* are indeed sown in the minds of most men; but by ill culture, as it springs up, it generally runs wild: either, on the one hand, by *false knowledge* which pedants call *Philology*, or *false reasoning* which Philosophers call *School-learning*; or on the other, by *false*

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VER. 20. *Most have the seeds*] *Omnes tacito quodam sensu, sine ulla arte, aut ratione, quæ sint in artibus ac rationibus recta & prava dijudicant.* Cic. de Orat. lib. 3.

VER. 25. *So by false learning*] *Plus sine doctrina prudentia, quam sine prudentia valet doctrina.* Quintil.

Between ℣ 25 and and 26 were these lines, since omitted by the author.

Many are spoil'd by that pedantic *throng,*
Who with great pains teach youth to reason wrong.
Tutors, *like* Virtuoso's, *oft inclin'd*
By strange transfusion *to improve the mind,*
Draw off the sense we have, to pour in new;
Which yet, with all their skill, they ne'er could do.

Some are bewilder'd in the maze of ſchools,
And ſome made coxcombs Nature meant but fools.
In ſearch of wit theſe loſe their common ſenſe,
And then turn Critics in their own defence:
Each burns alike, who can, or cannot write,
Or with a Rival's, or an Eunuch's ſpite.
All fools have ſtill an itching to deride,
And fain would be upon the laughing ſide.
If *Mævius* ſcribble in *Apollo*'s ſpight,
There are, who judge ſtill worſe than he can write.
Some have at firſt for Wits, then Poets paſt,
Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain fools at laſt.

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wit which is not regulated by *ſenſe*; or *falſe politeneſs* which is ſolely regulated by the *faſhion*. Both theſe ſorts, who have their Judgments thus doubly depraved, the poet obſerves are naturally turned to cenſure and reprehenſion; only with this difference, that the *Dunce* always affects to be on the *reaſoning*, and the *Fool* on the *laughing* ſide.—And thus, at the ſame time, our author proves the truth of his inductory obſervation, *that the number of bad Critics is vaſtly ſuperior to that of bad Poets.*

VER. 28. *In* ſearch of Wit *theſe loſe their* common ſenſe] This obſervation is extremely juſt. *Search of wit* is not only the *occaſion*, but the *efficient cauſe* of *loſs of common ſenſe*. For *wit* conſiſting in chuſing out, and ſetting together, ſuch ideas from whoſe likeneſſes pleaſant pictures are made in the fancy; the *Judgment* thro' an habitual *ſearch* of *Wit*, loſes by degrees its faculty of ſeeing the true relations of things; in which conſiſts the exerciſe of *common ſenſe*.

VER. 36. *Some have at firſt for Wits, &c.*] The poet having thus enumerated, in this account of the nature of Judgment and its ſeveral depravations, the ſeveral ſort of *bad Critics*, and ranked them into two general Claſſes; as the firſt ſort, namely thoſe ſpoiled by *falſe learning*, are but few in compariſon of the other, and likewiſe come leſs within his main view (which is *poetical Criticiſm*) but keep groveling at the bottom amongſt *words* and *letters*, he thought it here ſufficient juſt to have mentioned them, propoſing to do them right elſewhere. But thoſe ſpoiled by *falſe taſte* are in-

Some neither can for Wits nor Critics paſs,
As heavy mules are neither horſe nor aſs.
Thoſe half-learn'd witlings, num'rous in our iſle,
As half-form'd inſects on the banks of *Nile*;
Unfiniſh'd things, one knows not what to call,
Their generation's ſo equivocal:
To tell 'em, would a hundred tongues require,
Or one vain wit's, that might a hundred tire.
But you who ſeek to give and merit fame,
And juſtly bear a Critic's noble name,

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numerable; and thoſe are his proper concern: He therefore, from ℣ 35 to 46. ſubdivides theſe again into the two claſſes of the *volatile* and *heavy*: He deſcribes in few words the quick progreſs of the one thro' *Criticiſm*, from falſe wit to plain folly, where they end; and the fixed ſtation of the other between the confines of both; who under the name of *Witlings*, have neither end nor meaſure. A kind of half formed creature from the equivocal generation of *vivacity* and *dulneſs*, like thoſe on the banks of *Nile*, from *heat* and *mud*.

VER. 46. *But you who ſeek, &c.*] Our author having thus far, by way of INTRODUCTION, explained the nature, uſe, and abuſe of *Criticiſm*, in a figurative deſcription of the qualities and characters of *Critics*; proceeds now to deliver the precepts of the Art. The firſt of which, from ℣ 47 to 68. is, that he who ſets up for a Critic ſhould previouſly examine his own ſtrength, and ſee how far he is qualified for the exerciſe of his profeſſion. He puts him in a way to make this diſcovery, in that admirable direction given ℣ 51.

And mark that point where ſenſe and dulneſs meet.

He had ſhewn above, that *Judgment*, without *Taſte* or *Genius*, is equally incapable of making a Critic or a Poet: In whatſoever ſubject then the Critic's *genius* no longer accompanies his *Judgment*, there he may be aſſured he is going out of his depth. This our author finely calls,

—*that point where ſenſe and dulneſs meet.*

And immediately adds the REASON of his precept; the Author of Nature having ſo conſtituted the mental faculties, that one of them can never excell but at the expenſe of another.

Be ſure yourſelf and your own reach to know,
How far your genius, taſte, and learning go;
Launch not beyond your depth, but be diſcreet,
And mark that point where ſenſe and dulneſs meet.
Nature to all things fix'd the limits fit,
And wiſely curb'd proud man's pretending wit.
As on the land while here the ocean gains,
In other parts it leaves wide ſandy plains;
Thus in the ſoul while memory prevails,
The ſolid pow'r of underſtanding fails;
Where beams of warm imagination play,
The memory's ſoft figures melt away.

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From this ſtate and ordination of the mental faculties, and the influence and effects they have one on another, our Poet draws this CONSEQUENCE, that no one genius can excell in more than one Art or Science; rarely in more than one part or portion of a Science. The *conſequence* ſhews the *neceſſity* of the precept, juſt as the *premiſſes*, from which it is drawn, ſhew the *reaſonableneſs* of it.

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VER. 51. *And mark that point where ſenſe and dullneſs meet*] Beſides the *peculiar* ſenſe explained above in the comment, the words have ſtill a more *general* meaning, and caution us againſt going on, when our Ideas begin to grow obſcure; as we are apt to do, tho' that obſcurity is a monition that we ſhould leave off; for it ariſes either thro' our ſmall acquaintance with the ſubject matter, or the incomprehenſible nature of the thing. In which circumſtances a genius will always write as dully as a dunce. An obſervation well worth the attention of all profound writers.

VER. 56. *Thus in the ſoul while memory prevails,*
The ſolid pow'r of underſtanding fails:
Where beams of warm *imagination play,*
The memory's ſoft figures melt away.]
Theſe obſervations are collected from an intimate knowledge of human nature. The cauſe of that languor and heavineſs in the *underſtanding*, which is almoſt inſeparable from a very ſtrong and tenacious *memory*, ſeems to be want of the proper exerciſe and activity of that power; the underſtanding being rather paſſive while

One ſcience only will one genius fit;
So vaſt is art, ſo narrow human wit:
Not only bounded to peculiar arts,
But oft' in thoſe confin'd to ſingle parts.
Like Kings we loſe the conqueſts gain'd before,
By vain ambition ſtill to make them more;
Each might his ſev'ral province well command,
Would all but ſtoop to what they underſtand.
Firſt follow *Nature*, and your judgment frame
By her juſt ſtandard, which is ſtill the ſame:

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VER. 68. *Firſt follow Nature, &c.*] The Critic obſerving the directions here given, and finding himſelf qualified for his office, is ſhewn next *how* to exerciſe it. And as he was to attend to *Nature* for a *Call*, ſo he is firſt and principally to follow her when *called*. And here again in this, as in the foregoing precept, the poet [from ℣ 67 to 84.] ſhews both the *reaſonableneſs*, and the *neceſſity* of it. The *reaſon* is, 1. Becauſe Nature is the *ſource* of poetic Art; as that Art is only a repreſentation of Nature; ſhe being its great exemplar and original. 2. Becauſe ſhe is the *end* of Art; the deſign of poetry being to convey the knowledge of Nature in the moſt agreable manner. 3. Becauſe ſhe is the *teſt* of Art, as ſhe is unerring, conſtant, and ſtill the ſame. Hence he obſerves that, as ſhe is the *ſource*, ſhe conveys *life* to Art: As the *end*, ſhe conveys *force* to it, for the *force* of any thing

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the memory is cultivating. As to the other appearance, the decay of memory by the vigorous exerciſe of Fancy, the poet himſelf ſeems to have intimated the cauſe in the epithet he has given to the Imagination. For if, according to the Atomic Philoſophy, the memory of things be preſerved in a concatenation of ideas, produced by the animal ſpirits moving in continued trains; the force and rapidity of the Imagination breaking and diſſipating thoſe trains, by conſtantly making new aſſociations, muſt neceſſarily weaken and diſorder the recollective faculty.

VER. 67. *Would all but ſtoop to what they underſtand*] The expreſſion is delicate, and implies what is very true, that moſt men think it a degradation of their genius to employ it in what lies under their comprehenſion, but had rather exerciſe their ambition in ſubduing what is placed above it.

Unerring NATURE, ſtill divinely bright,
One clear, unchang'd, and univerſal light,
Life, force, and beauty, muſt to all impart,
At once the ſource, and end, and teſt of Art.
Art from that fund each juſt ſupply provides,
Works without ſhow, and without pomp preſides:

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ariſes from its being directed to its *end*; and, as the *teſt*, ſhe conveys *beauty* to it, for every thing acquires *beauty* by its being reduced to its true *ſtandard*. Such is the important ſenſe of thoſe two lines,

> Life, force, *and* beauty *muſt to all impart*,
> *At once the* ſource, *and* end, *and* teſt *of Art*.

We now come to the *neceſſity* of the Precept. The two great conſtituent qualities of a compoſition as ſuch, are *Art* and *Wit*: But neither of theſe attains its perfection, 'till the firſt be *hid*, and the other judiciouſly *reſtrained*; which is only then when *Nature* is exactly followed, for then Art can never make a parade nor Wit commit an extravagance. Art, while it adheres to Nature, and has ſo large a *fund* in the reſources which ſhe ſupplies, diſpoſes every thing with ſo much *eaſe* and *ſimplicity*, that we ſee nothing but thoſe natural images it works with, while itſelf ſtands behind and unobſerved: But when *Art* leaves *Nature*, deluded either by the bold extravagance of Fancy or the quaint groteſques of Faſhion, ſhe is then obliged at every ſtep to come forward in a painful or pompous oſtentation, to cover, or ſoften, or regulate the ſhocking diſproportion of *unnatural* images. In the firſt caſe, the poet compares *Art* to the Soul within, informing a beauteous Body: But we generally find it, in the laſt caſe, only like the Habit without, bolſtering up, by the ſkill of the Taylor, the defects of a miſhapen one.—Again, as to *Wit*, it might perhaps be imagined that this needed only Judgment to govern it: But as he well obſerves

> — Wit *and* Judgment *often are at ſtrife*,
> *Tho' meant each other's aid, like Man and Wife.*

They want therefore ſome friendly Mediator or Reconciler, which is *Nature*: And in attending to her, the *Judgment* will learn where to comply with the charms of Wit, and the *Wit* how to obey the directions of Judgment.

In ſome fair body thus th' informing ſoul
With ſpirits feeds, with vigour fills the whole,
Each motion guides, and ev'ry nerve ſuſtains;
Itſelf unſeen, but in th' effects, remains.
Some, to whom Heav'n in wit has been profuſe,
Want as much more, to turn it to its uſe;
For wit and judgment often are at ſtrife,
Tho' meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
'Tis more to guide, than ſpur the Muſe's ſteed;
Reſtrain his fury, than provoke his ſpeed;
The winged courſer, like a gen'rous horſe,
Shows moſt true mettle when you check his courſe.
Thoſe RULES of old diſcover'd, not devis'd,
Are Nature ſtill, but Nature methodiz'd;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 88. *Thoſe Rules of old, &c.*] Having thus, in his firſt precept, *to follow Nature*, ſettled Criticiſm on its true bottom; he proceeds to ſhew what aſſiſtance may be had from *Art*. But leſt this ſhould be thought to draw the Critic from the foundation where he had before fixed him, he previouſly obſerves [from ℣ 87 to 92] that thoſe *Rules* of *Art*, which he is now about to recommend to his ſtudy, were not invented in the Imagination, but diſcovered in the book of Nature: And that, therefore, tho' they may ſeem to reſtrain *Nature* by *Laws*, yet, as they are laws of her own making, the Critic is ſtill properly in the very liberty of Nature. Thoſe *Rules* the ancient Critics borrowed from the Poets, who received them immediately from *Nature*,

Juſt Precepts thus from great Examples giv'n,
Theſe drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n;

and are both therefore to be well ſtudied.

Nature, like Liberty, is but reſtrain'd
By the ſame Laws which firſt herſelf ordain'd.
Hear how learn'd Greece her uſeful rules indites,
When to repreſs, and when indulge our flights:
High on Parnaſſus' top her ſons ſhe ſhow'd,
And pointed out thoſe arduous paths they trod;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 92. *Hear how learn'd Greece, &c.*] He ſpeaks of the *Critics* firſt, and with great judgment, as the previous knowledge of them is neceſſary for reading the Poets, with that fruit which the intent here propoſed requires. But having, in the previous obſervation, ſufficiently explained the Nature of ancient Criticiſm, he enters on the ſubject [treated of from ℣ 91 to 118] with a ſublime deſcription of its End; which was to illuſtrate the beauties of the beſt Writers, in order to excite others to an emulation of their excellence. From the tranſport which theſe Ideas raiſe in him, the poet is naturally brought back to reflect on the degeneracy of modern Criticiſm: And as the reſtoring the Art to its ancient integrity and ſplendor is the great purpoſe of his poem, he firſt takes notice of thoſe, who ſeem not to underſtand that *Nature* is exhauſtleſs, and that new models of good writing may be produced in every age, and conſequently new rules may be diſcovered from theſe new works, in the ſame manner as the old Critics diſcovered theirs, from the writings of their contemporary Poets: But theſe men wanting art and ability to diſcover theſe *new rules*, were content to receive and file up for uſe the *old ones* of *Ariſtotle*, *Quintilian*, *Longinus*, *Horace*, *&c.* with the ſame vanity and inſolence that Apothecaries practiſe with their Doctors bills: And thus boldly applying them to *new Originals* (caſes which they did not hit) it was no more in their power than their will to imitate the practice of the *Ancients*, when

The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire,
And taught the world with reaſon to admire.

For, as *Ignorance* when joined with *Humility* produces a blind admiration, on which account it is ſo commonly obſerved to be the mother of Devotion; ſo when joined with *Pride* (as it always is in bad Critics) it gives birth to every iniquity of abuſe and ſlander.

Held from afar, aloft, th' immortal prize,
And urg'd the reſt by equal ſteps to riſe.
Juſt precepts thus from great examples giv'n,
She drew from them what they deriv'd from Heav'n.
The gen'rous Critic fann'd the Poet's fire,
And taught the world with reaſon to admire.
Then Criticiſm the Muſes handmaid prov'd,
To dreſs her charms, and make her more belov'd:
But following wits from that intention ſtray'd,
Who cou'd not win the miſtreſs, woo'd the maid;
Againſt the Poets their own arms they turn'd,
Sure to hate moſt the men from whom they learn'd.
So modern 'Pothecaries, taught the art
By Doctor's bills to play the Doctor's part,
Bold in the practice of miſtaken rules,
Preſcribe, apply, and call their maſters fools.
Some on the leaves of antient authors prey,
Nor time nor moths e'er ſpoil'd ſo much as they.
Some drily plain, without invention's aid,
Write dull receits how poems may be made.
Theſe leave the ſenſe, their learning to diſplay,
And thoſe explain the meaning quite away.

NOTES.

VER. 98. *Juſt precepts*] *Nec enim artibus editis factum eſt ut argumenta inveniremus, ſed dicta ſunt omnia antequam præciperentur; mox ea ſcriptores obſervata & collecta ediderunt.* Quintil.

You then whoſe judgment the right courſe would ſteer,
Know well each ANCIENT's proper character;
His Fable, Subject, ſcope in every page;
Religion, Country, genius of his Age:
Without all theſe at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticize.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 118. *You then whoſe Judgment, &c.*] He comes next to the *ancient Poets*, thoſe other and more intimate commentators of Nature. And ſhews [from ℣ 117 to 141.] that the ſtudy of theſe muſt indiſpenſably follow that of the *ancient Critics*, as they furniſh us with what is not to be ſupplied by any Critics, who can only give *general directions*, inſufficient alone to conduct us ſafely thro' any conſiderable works: But the ſtudy of a great original Poet, in

His fable, ſubject, ſcope in ev'ry page,
Religion, country, genius of his age,

will help us to thoſe *particular rules*, of ſo much ſervice to us in their application to whatever work we undertake to examine; and without which, as the poet truly obſerves, we may *cavil* indeed, but can *never criticiſe*. We might as well think that *Vitruvius* alone would make a perfect Judge of Architecture, without the knowledge of ſome great maſterpiece of ſcience, ſuch as the Rotonda at *Rome*, or the Temple of *Minerva* at *Athens*; as that *Ariſtotle* ſhould make a *perfect Judge of wit* without the ſtudy of *Homer* and *Virgil*. Theſe therefore he principally recommends to perfect the Critic in his Art. But as this latter Poet by ſome ſuperficial writers has been conſidered rather as a copyer of *Homer*, than an original himſelf, our Author obviates that common error, and ſhews it to have ariſen (as often error does) from a truth, *viz.* that *Homer and Nature were the ſame*; and therefore the ambitious young Poet, tho' he ſcorn'd to ſtoop at any thing ſhort of Nature, yet when he underſtood this great truth, he had the prudence to contemplate her in the place where ſhe was ſeen to moſt advantage, collected in all her charms in the clear mirror of *Homer*. Hence it would follow that tho' *Virgil* ſtudied Nature, the vulgar reader would judge him a copier of *Homer*; and tho' he copied *Homer*, the judicious would ſee him to be an imitator of Nature: The fineſt praiſe which any one who came after *Homer* could receive.

Be Homer's works your ſtudy, and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night;
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
And trace the Muſes upward to their ſpring.
Still with itſelf compar'd, his text peruſe;
And let your comment be the Mantuan Muſe.

When firſt young Maro in his boundleſs mind
A work t'outlaſt immortal Rome deſign'd,
Perhaps he ſeem'd above the Critic's law,
And but from Nature's fountains ſcorn'd to draw:
But when t'examine ev'ry part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the ſame.
Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checks the bold deſign;
And rules as ſtrict his labour'd work confine,
As if the Stagirite o'erlook'd each line.

NOTES.

VER. 123. *Cavil you may but never criticiſe*] The author after this verſe originally inſerted the following, which he has however omitted in all the editions:

Zoilus, *had theſe been known, without a name*
Had dy'd, and Perault *ne'er been damn'd to fame;*
The ſenſe of ſound Antiquity had reign'd,
And ſacred Homer *yet been unprophan'd.*
None e'er had thought his comprehenſive mind
To modern Cuſtoms, modern Rules confin'd;
Who for all ages writ, and all mankind.

VER. 130. *When firſt young Maro, &c.*] Virgil, Eclog. 6.
Cum canerem reges & prælia, Cynthius aurem
Vellit—— It is a tradition preſerved by *Servius*, that *Virgil* began with writing a poem of the *Alban* and *Roman* affairs; which he found above his years, and deſcended firſt to imitate *Theocritus* on rural ſubjects, and afterwards to copy *Homer* in Heroic poetry.

Learn hence for ancient rules a juſt eſteem;
To copy nature is to copy them.
Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare,
For there's a happineſs as well as care.
Muſic reſembles Poetry, in each
Are nameleſs graces which no methods teach,
And which a maſter-hand alone can reach.
If, where the rules not far enough extend,
(Since rules were made but to promote their end)

COMMENTARY.

VER. 141. *Some beauties yet no Precepts can declare, &c.*] Our author, in theſe two general precepts of ſtudying *Nature* and her *Commentators*, having conſidered Poetry as it *is*, or *may be* reduced to *Rule*; leſt this ſhould be miſtaken as ſufficient to attain PERFECTION either in *writing* or *judging*, he proceeds [from ℣ 140 to 201.] to point up to thoſe *ſublimer beauties* which *Rules* will never reach, nor enable us either to *execute* or *taſte:* And which riſe ſo high above all precept as not even to be deſcribed by it; but being entirely the gift of Heaven, Art and Reaſon have no further concern with them than juſt to moderate their operations. Theſe *Sublimities* of Poetry, like the *Myſteries* of Religion, ſome of which are above Reaſon, and ſome contrary to it, may alſo be divided into two ſorts, ſuch as are *above* Rules, and ſuch as are *contrary* to them.

VER. 146. *If where the rules, &c.*] The firſt ſort our author deſcribes [from ℣ 145 to 158.] and ſhews, that where a great beauty is in the *Poet*'s view which no ſtated *Rules* will direct him how to reach, there, as the purpoſe of Rules is only to promote an end like this, a lucky *Licence* will ſupply the want of them: Nor can the *Critic* fairly object to it, ſince this *Licence*, for the reaſon given above, has the proper force and authority of a *Rule*.

NOTES.

VER. 146. *If, where the rules, &c.*] *Neque enim rogationibus plebiſve ſcitis ſancta ſunt iſta Præcepta, ſed hoc quicquid eſt, Utilitas excogitavit. Non negabo autem ſic utile eſſe plerumque; verum ſi eadem illa nobis aliud ſuadebit Utilitas, hanc, relictis magiſtrorum autoritatibus, ſequamur.* Quintil. lib. ii. cap. 13.

Some lucky Licence anſwers to the full
Th' intent propos'd, that Licence is a rule.
Thus Pegaſus, a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common track;
From vulgar bounds with brave diſorder part,
And ſnatch a grace beyond the reach of art,
Which without paſſing thro' the judgment, gains
The heart, and all its end at once attains.
In proſpects thus, ſome objects pleaſe our eyes,
Which out of nature's common order riſe,
The ſhapeleſs rock, or hanging precipice.
Great Wits ſometimes may glorioufly offend,
And riſe to faults true Critics dare not mend.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 159. *Great Wits ſometimes may glorioufly offend, &c.*] He deſcribes next the *ſecond ſort*, the beauties *againſt rule*. And even here, as he obſerves, the offenſe is ſo glorious, and the fault ſo ſublime, that the *true Critic*

NOTES.

VER. 150.] *Thus* Pegaſus, *&c.*] We have obſerved how the precepts for *writing* and *judging* are interwoven throughout the whole work. He firſt deſcribes the ſublime flight of a *Poet*, ſoaring above all vulgar bounds, to ſnatch a *grace* directly, which lies beyond the reach of a common adventurer. And afterwards, the *effect* of that *grace* upon the true *Critic:* whom it penetrates with an equal rapidity, going the neareſt way to his *heart*, without paſſing thro' his *Judgment*. By which is not meant that it could not ſtand the teſt of Judgment; but that being a beauty uncommon, and *above rule*, and the Judgment habituated to determine only *by rule*, it makes its direct application to the Heart; which once gained, ſoon opens and enlarges the Judgment, whoſe concurrence, it being now ſet above forms, is eaſily procured. That this is the poet's ſublime conception appears from the concluding words:

——*and all its end at once attains.*

But Poetry doth not attain *all its end*, 'till it hath gained the *Judgment* as well as *Heart*.

But tho' the Ancients thus their rules invade,
(As Kings diſpenſe with laws themſelves have made)
Moderns, beware! or if you muſt offend
Againſt the Precept, ne'er tranſgreſs its End;
Let it be ſeldom, and compell'd by need;
And have, at leaſt, their precedent to plead.
The Critic elſe proceeds without remorſe,
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force.
I know there are, to whoſe preſumptuous thoughts
Thoſe freer beauties, ev'n in them, ſeem faults.

COMMENTARY.

will not dare either to cenſure or reform them. Yet ſtill the *Poet* is never to abandon himſelf to his Imagination: The rules our author lays down for his conduct in this reſpect, are theſe: 1. That tho' he tranſgreſs the *letter* of ſome *one particular* precept, yet that he ſtill adheres to the end or *ſpirit* of them *all*; which end is the creation of *one perfect uniform Whole*. And 2. That he have, in each particular inſtance, the authority of the *diſpenſing* power of the Ancients to plead for his excuſe. Theſe rules obſerved, this licence will be *ſeldom* uſed, and only when *compell'd by need*: Which will diſarm the Critic, and ſcreen the Poet from his laws.

VER. 169. *I know there are, &c.*] But as ſome *modern Critics* have had the preſumption to ſay, that this laſt rule is only juſtifying one fault by another, our author goes on [from ℣ 169 to 180] to vindicate the *Ancients*; and to ſhew that this cenſure proceeds from frank Ignorance. As where their partial Judgment cannot ſee that this licence is ſometimes uſed as neceſſary to give the moſt graceful ſymmetry and proportion to a perfect whole, from the *point* and in the *light* wherein it muſt be viewed: Or, where their haſty Judgment will not give them time to diſcover, that a deviation from rule is for the ſake of attaining a great and admirable purpoſe. Theſe obſervations are further uſeful as they tend to give modern Critics an humbler opinion of their own abilities, and an higher of the Authors they undertake to criticiſe. On which ac-

Some figures monſtrous and miſhap'd appear,
Conſider'd ſingly, or beheld too near,
Which, but proportion'd to their light, or place,
Due diſtance reconciles to form and grace.
A prudent chief not always muſt diſplay
His pow'rs in equal ranks, and fair array,
But with th' occaſion and the place comply,
Conceal his force, nay ſeem ſometimes to fly.
Thoſe oft are ſtratagems which errors ſeem,
Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.
Still green with bays each ancient Altar ſtands,
Above the reach of ſacrilegious hands;

COMMENTARY.

count he concludes with a fine ſtroke of ſatire, againſt a common *proverb* perpetually in the mouths of Critics, *quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*; miſunderſtanding the ſenſe of *Horace*, and taking *quandoque* for *aliquando*:

Thoſe oft are ſtratagems which errors ſeem,
Nor is it Homer nods, *but we that dream.*

VER. 181. *Still green with bays, &c.*] But now fired with the name of *Homer*, and tranſported with the contemplation of thoſe beauties which a cold Critic can neither ſee nor conceive, the Poet breaks into a rapturous exclamation on the felicity of the Ancients in riſing ſuperior over time and accidents: And, as it were diſdaining any longer to reaſon with his Critics, offers this to them as the ſureſt confutation of their cenſures. Then with the *humility* of a ſupplicant at the ſhrine of Immortals, and the *Sub-*

NOTES.

VER. 180. *Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream.*] *Modeſtè, & circumſpectò judicio de tantis viris pronunciandum eſt, ne quod (quod pleriſque accidit) damnent quod non intelligunt. Ac ſi neceſſe eſt in alteram errare partem, omnia eorum legentibus placere, quammulta diſplicere maluerim.* Quintil.

Secure from Flames, from Envy's fiercer rage,
Deſtructive War, and all-involving Age.
See, from each clime the learn'd their incenſe bring!
Hear, in all tongues conſenting Pæans ring!
In praiſe ſo juſt let ev'ry voice be join'd,
And fill the gen'ral chorus of mankind.
Hail, Bards triumphant! born in happier days;
Immortal heirs of univerſal praiſe!
Whoſe honours with increaſe of ages grow,
As ſtreams roll down, enlarging as they flow;
Nations unborn your mighty names ſhall ſound,
And worlds applaud that muſt not yet be found!
Oh may ſome ſpark of your celeſtial fire,
The laſt, the meaneſt of your ſons inſpire,
(That on weak wings, from far, purſues your flights;
Glows while he reads, but trembles as he writes)

COMMENTARY.

limity of a Poet participating of their fire, he turns again to theſe ancient worthies, and apoſtrophiſes their Manes:

Hail, Bards triumphant, &c.

NOTES.

VER. 183. *Secure from* flames, *from* envy's *fiercer rage,*
Deſtructive war, *and all-involving* age.] The four great cauſes of the ravage amongſt ancient writings are here alluded to: The deſtruction of the *Alexandrine* and *Palatine* libraries by fire; the fiercer rage of *Zoilus* and *Mævius* and their followers againſt Wit; the irruption of the *Barbarians* into the empire; and the long reign of Ignorance and Superſtition in the cloiſters.

To teach vain Wits a ſcience little known,
T' admire ſuperior ſenſe, and doubt their own!

OF all the Cauſes which conſpire to blind
Man's erring judgment, and miſguide the mind,
What the weak head with ſtrongeſt biaſs rules,
Is *Pride*, the never-failing vice of fools.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 200. *T' admire ſuperior ſenſe*, and *doubt their own.*] Here our author concludes the firſt diviſion of his diſcourſe, where the laſt line not only tells us the *ſubject* of that and the following, and ſhews the *connection* they have to one another, but ſerves likewiſe to *introduce* the ſecond part. — The effect of ſtudying the *Ancients*, as hitherto recommended, would be the *admiration of their ſuperior ſenſe*; which, if it will not of itſelf diſpoſe *Moderns* to a *diffidence of their own* (one of the great uſes, as well as natural fruits of that ſtudy) the poet helps forward their modeſty, in his ſecond part; by ſhewing them, in a regular deduction of the *cauſes and effects of wrong Judgment*, their own image and turn of mind.

VER. 201. *Of all the cauſes &c.*] Having, in the firſt part, delivered *Rules* for *perfecting the Art of Criticiſm*, the ſecond is employ'd in explaining the *Impediments* to it. The order of the two parts is judicious. For the cauſes of wrong Judgment being *Pride*, *ſuperficial Learning*, *narrow Thinking*, and *Partiality*; thoſe to whom this part is principally addreſſed, would not readily be brought either to ſee the malignity of the *cauſes*, or to own themſelves concerned in the *effect*, had not the author previouſly both enlightened and convicted them, by the foregoing obſervations, on the *vaſtneſs of Art*, and *narrowneſs of Wit*; the extenſive *ſtudy of human Nature and Antiquity*; and the *Characters of ancient Poetry and Criticiſm*; the natural remedies to the four epidemic diſorders he is now endeavouring to redreſs.

VER. 203. *What the weak head, &c.*] The firſt cauſe of wrong Judgment is PRIDE. He very properly begins with this, as on other accounts, ſo on this, that it is the very thing which gives modern Criticiſm its character; whoſe complexion is *abuſe* and *cenſure*. He calls it the vice of *Fools*; by whom are not meant thoſe to whom Nature has given no Judgment (for he is here ſpeaking of what miſleads the Judgment) but thoſe in whom education and ſtudy has made no improvement; as appears from the happy ſimilitude of an *ill-nouriſhed body*; where the ſame words which expreſs the *cauſe*, expreſs likewiſe the *nature* of pride:

For as in bodies, thus in ſouls, we find,
What wants in blood and ſpirits, ſwell'd with wind.

'Tis the buſineſs of reaſon, like the ſun, to diſpel the *cloud* which pride throws over the mind:

Whatever Nature has in worth deny'd,
She gives in large recruits of needful Pride;
For as in bodies, thus in ſouls, we find
What wants in blood and ſpirits, ſwell'd with wind:
Pride, where Wit fails, ſteps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty Void of ſenſe.
If once right reaſon drives that cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with reſiſtleſs day.
Truſt not yourſelf; but your defects to know,
Make uſe of ev'ry friend——and ev'ry foe.
A *little learning* is a dang'rous thing;
Drink deep, or taſte not the Pierian ſpring:
There ſhallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely ſobers us again.

COMMENTARY.

But the miſchief is, that the rays of reaſon, diverted by ſelf-love, ſometimes *gild* this *cloud*, inſtead of *diſſipating* it. So that the Judgment, by falſe lights reflected back upon itſelf, is ſtill apt to be a little dazzled, and to miſtake its object. He therefore adviſes to call in ſtill more helps:

VER. 213. Truſt not yourſelf; *but your defects to know,*
Make uſe of ev'ry Friend—and ev'ry Foe.

Both the *beginning* and *concluſion* of this precept are remarkable. The queſtion is of the means to ſubdue Pride. He directs the Critic to begin with a *diſtruſt of himſelf*; and this is *Modeſty*, the *firſt* mortification of Pride: And then to ſeek the aſſiſtance of others, which concludes with *making uſe even of an Enemy*; and this is *Humility*, the *laſt* mortification of Pride: For when a man can once bring himſelf to ſubmit to profit by an enemy, he has either already quite ſubdued it, or is in a fair way of ſo doing.

VER. 215. *A little learning, &c.*] We muſt here remark the Poet's ſkill in his diſpoſition of the *cauſes* obſtructing true Judgment. Each general cauſe which is laid down firſt, has its own particular cauſe in that which follows. Thus, the *ſecond* cauſe of wrong Judgment, SUPERFICIAL LEARNING, is what gives birth to that critical Pride, which he mentioned firſt.

VER. 217. *There* ſhallow *draughts* intoxicate the brain, *&c.*] *Nature* and *Learning* are the pole ſtars of all true Criticiſm: But *Pride* hinders the ſight of Nature; and a *ſmatter-*

Fir'd at firſt ſight with what the Muſe imparts,
In fearleſs youth we tempt the heights of Arts,
While from the bounded level of our mind,
Short views we take, nor ſee the lengths behind;
But, more advanc'd, behold with ſtrange ſurprize
New diſtant ſcenes of endleſs ſcience riſe!
So pleas'd at firſt the tow'ring Alps we try,
Mount o'er the vales, and ſeem to tread the ſky,
Th' eternal ſnows appear already paſt,
And the firſt clouds and mountains ſeem the laſt:
But, thoſe attain'd, we tremble to ſurvey
The growing labours of the lengthen'd way,
Th' increaſing proſpect tires our wand'ring eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps on Alps ariſe!
A perfect Judge will read each work of Wit,
With the ſame ſpirit that its author writ:

COMMENTARY.

ing of letters takes away all ſenſe of the want of Learning. The natural conſequence is what he here adviſes, either to drink deep, or not to taſte at all; for the leaſt ſip is enough to make a bad Critic, while even a moderate draught can never make a good one. And yet the labours and difficulties of *drinking deep* are ſo great, that a young author, "Fir'd with ideas of fair Italy," and ambitious to ſnatch a palm from *Rome*, engages in an undertaking as arduous almoſt as that of *Hannibal:* Finely illuſtrated by the ſimilitude of an unexperienced traveller penetrating thro' the *Alps*.

VER. 233. *A perfect Judge, &c.*] The third cauſe of wrong Judgment is a narrow and BOUNDED COMPREHENSION; the natural and neceſſary *cauſe* of the fore-

NOTES.

VER. 233. *A perfect Judge, &c.*] *Diligenter legendum eſt, ac pæne ad ſcribendi ſollicitudinem: Nec per partes modo ſcrutanda ſunt omnia, ſed perlectus liber utique ex integro reſumendus.* Quintil.

Survey the WHOLE, nor ſeek ſlight faults to find
Where nature moves, and rapture warms the mind;
Nor loſe, for that malignant dull delight,
The gen'rous pleaſure to be charm'd with wit.
But in ſuch lays as neither ebb, nor flow,
Correctly cold, and regularly low,
That ſhunning faults, one quiet tenour keep;
We cannot blame indeed——but we may ſleep.
In Wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
Is not th' exactneſs of peculiar parts;

COMMENTARY.

going defect, *acquieſcence in ſuperficial learning*. This *bounded Capacity* the poet ſhews [from 233 to 384] betrays itſelf two ways; in the *matter*, and in the *manner* of the work criticiſed. As to the matter, in judging *by parts*; or in having one *favorite part* to a neglect of all the reſt: As to the manner, in confining the regard only to *conceit*, or *language*, or *numbers*. This is our author's order; and we ſhall follow him as it leads us; only juſt obſerving one great beauty running thro' this part of the poem, which is that under each of theſe heads of *wrong* Judgment, he has interworked excellent precepts for *right*. We ſhall take notice of them as they occur.

He expoſes the folly of judging by parts very artfully, not by a direct deſcription of that ſort of Critic, but of his oppoſite, *a perfect Judge, &c.* Nor is the elegance of this converſion leſs than the Art; for as, in *poetic ſtyle*, one word or figure is ſtill put for another, in order to catch new lights from diſtant images, and reflect them back upon the ſubject in hand; ſo, in *poetical matter*, one perſon or deſcription may be commodiouſly employed for another, with the ſame advantage of repreſentation. It is obſervable that our author makes it almoſt the neceſſary conſequence of judging *by parts*, to find fault: And this not without much diſcernment. For the ſeveral *parts* of a compleat *Whole*, when *ſeen only ſingly*, and *known only independently*, muſt always have the appearance of irregularity, and often, of deformity: Becauſe the Poet's deſign being to *create* a reſultive beauty from the artful aſſemblage of ſeveral various *parts* into one natural *whole*; thoſe parts muſt be faſhioned with regard to the *mutual relations*, from whence the beauty required is to ariſe: But that regard will occaſion ſo unreducible a form in each part, as, when *conſidered ſingly*, to preſent the appearance of an Irregularity.

'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.
Thus when we view some well-proportion'd dome,
(The world's just wonder, and ev'n thine, O Rome!)
No single parts unequally surprize,
All comes united to th' admiring eyes;
No monstrous height, or breadth, or length appear;
The Whole at once is bold, and regular.
Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In ev'ry work regard the writer's End,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spight of trivial faults, is due.
As men of breeding, sometimes men of wit,
T' avoid great errors, must the less commit;
Neglect the rules each verbal Critic lays,
For not to know some trifles, is a praise.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 253. *Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see*] He shews, in the second place, that to fix our censure on *single parts*, tho' they happen to *want* an exactness consistent enough with their relation to the rest, is even then very unjust: And for these reasons, 1. Because it implies an expectation of a *faultless piece*, which is a vain imagination: 2. Because no more is to be expected of any work than that it fairly *attains its end*: But the end may be attained, and yet these trivial faults committed: Therefore, in spight of such faults, the work will merit the praise due to that attainment. 3. Because sometimes a great beauty is not to be had, nor a notorious blemish to be avoided, but by the suffering one of these minute and trivial errors. And lastly, because the generous *neglect* of them is a *praise*; as it is the indication of a *Genius*, busied about greater matters.

Moſt Critics, fond of ſome ſubſervient art,
Still make the Whole depend upon a Part:
They talk of principles, but notions prize,
And all to one lov'd Folly ſacrifice.
Once on a time, La Mancha's Knight, they ſay,
A certain Bard encountr'ing on the way,

COMMENTARY.

VER. 263. *Moſt Critics, fond of ſome ſubſervient art, &c.*] II. The *ſecond* way in which the *bounded comprehenſion*, as it relates to the *matter*, ſhews itſelf, is judging by a *favorite Part*. The author has placed this after the other of judging *by parts*, with great propriety, it being indeed a natural conſequence of it. For when men have once left the *whole* to turn their attention to the *ſeparate parts*, that regard and reverence due only to a *whole*, is fondly transferred to one or other of its *parts*. And thus we ſee that Heroes themſelves as well as Hero-makers, even *Kings* as well as *Critics*, when they chance never to have had, or long to have loſt the idea of that which is the only legitimate object of their office, the care and conſervation of the *whole*, are wont entirely to devote themſelves to the ſervice of ſome favorite part, whether it be love of money, military glory, deſpoticiſm, *&c.* *And all*, as our Poet ſays on this occaſion,

——— *to one lov'd Folly ſacrifice.*

This general miſconduct much recommends that maxim in good Poetry and Politics, *to give a principal attention to the whole* (a maxim which our author has elſewhere demonſtrated to be equally true likewiſe in *Morals* and *Religion*) and ſhews it to be founded in the order of things: For if we examine, we ſhall find it ariſe from this *principle* of human nature, that the mind muſt always have ſomething *to reſt upon*, to which the paſſions and affections may be intereſtingly directed. Com-

NOTES.

VER. 267. *Once on a time, &c.*] This tale is ſo very appoſite, that one would naturally take it to be of the Poet's own invention; and ſo much in the ſpirit of *Cervantes*, that one might eaſily miſtake it for a principal ornament of that incomparable Satire. But, in truth, it is neither one nor the other; but a ſtory taken by our Author, from the *ſpurious Don Quixote*, which ſhews how judicious an uſe may be made of General reading, when if there is but one good thing in a book (as in that wretched performance there ſcarce was more) it may be pick'd out, and employ'd to an excellent purpoſe.

Diſcours'd in terms as juſt, with looks as ſage,
As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian ſtage;
Concluding all were deſp'rate ſots and fools,
Who durſt depart from Ariſtotle's rules.
Our Author, happy in a judge ſo nice,
Produc'd his Play, and begg'd the Knight's advice;
Made him obſerve the ſubject, and the plot,
The manners, paſſions, unities; what not?
All which, exact to rule, were brought about,
Were but a Combat in the liſts left out.
"What! leave the Combate out?" exclaims the Knight;
Yes, or we muſt renounce the Stagirite.
"Not ſo by Heav'n" (he anſwers in a rage)
"Knights, ſquires, and ſteeds, muſt enter on the ſtage."

COMMENTARY.

mon ſenſe prompts us to ſeek it in the moſt worthy object; and reflection points us to a *Whole* or *Syſtem:* But the clouds of Ignorance, and the falſe lights of the Paſſions, miſlead and dazzle us; we ſtop ſhort, and before we get to a *Whole*, take up with ſome *Part*; which from thence becomes our Favorite.

VER. 285. *Thus Critics of leſs judgment than caprice,*
Curious *not* knowing, *not* exact *but* nice,
Form ſhort Ideas, &c.

2. He concludes his obſervations on thoſe *two ſorts* of judges *by parts*, with this general reflexion. The *curious not knowing* are the *firſt* ſort, who judge *by parts*, and with a *microſcopic* ſight (as he ſays elſewhere) *examine bit by bit:* The *not exact but nice*, are the *ſecond*, who judge by *a favorite part*, and talk of a *whole* to cover their fondneſs for a *part*; as Philoſophers do of *principles*, in order to obtrude their *notions* or opinions for ſuch. But the fate common to both is, *to form ſhort ideas*, or to have ideas ſhort of truth: Tho' the latter ſort, thro' a fondneſs to their *favorite part*, imagine that they comprehend the *whole* in epitome: As the famous Hero of *La Mancha* mentioned juſt before uſed to maintain, that *Knight Errantry* compriſed within itſelf the quinteſſence of all Science civil and military.

So vaſt a throng the ſtage can ne'er contain.
" Then build a new, or act it in a plain."
Thus Critics, of leſs judgment than caprice,
Curious not knowing, not exact but nice,
Form ſhort Ideas; and offend in arts
(As moſt in manners) by a love to parts.
Some to *Conceit* alone their taſte confine,
And glitt'ring thoughts ſtruck out at ev'ry line;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 289. *Some to Conceit alone, &c.*] We come now to that ſecond ſort of *bounded capacity*, which betrays itſelf in the *manner* of the work criticiſed. And this our Author proſecutes from ℣ 288 to 384. Theſe are again ſubdivided into divers claſſes.

The firſt [℣ 289. *Some to Conceit alone, &c*] are thoſe who confine their attention ſolely to *Conceit* or *Wit*. And here again we are to obſerve, that the Critics *by parts*, as to the *manner*, offend *doubly* in their judgments, juſt as thoſe did in the *matter:* Not only by confining their attention to a *part*, when it ſhould be extended to the *whole;* but likewiſe in judging *falſely* of that *part*. And this, in both caſes, is unavoidable, as the *parts* in the *manner*, bear the ſame cloſe relation to the *whole*, that the *parts* in the *matter* do; to which *whole* the ideas of theſe Critics have never yet extended. Hence it is, that our author, ſpeaking here of thoſe who confine their at-

NOTES.

VER. 285. *Thus Critics of leſs* judgment *than* caprice,
Curious *not* knowing, *not* exact *but* nice.] In theſe two lines the poet deſcribes the way in which bad writers are wont to imitate the qualities of good ones. As true *Judgment* generally draws men out of popular opinions, ſo he who cannot get from the croud by the aſſiſtance of this guide, willingly follows *Caprice*, which will be ſure to lead him into ſingularities. Again, true *Knowledge* is the art of treaſuring up only that which, from its uſe in life, is worthy of being lodged in the memory: But *Curioſity* conſiſts in a vain attention to every thing out of the way, and which, for its uſefulneſs the world leaſt regards. Laſtly, *Exactneſs* is the juſt proportion of parts to one another, and their harmony in a whole: But he who has not extent of capacity for the exerciſe of this quality, contents himſelf with *Nicety*, which is a buſying one's ſelf about points and ſyllables.

Pleas'd with a work where nothing's juſt or fit;
One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit.
Poets like painters, thus, unſkill'd to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
With gold and jewels cover ev'ry part,
And hide with ornaments their want of art.
True Wit is Nature to advantage dreſs'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er ſo well expreſs'd;

COMMENTARY.

tention ſolely to *Conceit* or *Wit*, deſcribes the two ſpecies of *true* and *falſe* Wit; becauſe they not only miſtake *a wrong diſpoſition of true Wit for a right*, but likewiſe *falſe Wit for true:* He deſcribes falſe Wit firſt, from ℣ 288 to 305.

Some to Conceit alone, &c.

Where the reader may obſerve our author's ſkill in repreſenting in a deſcription of *falſe* Wit, the falſe diſpoſition of the *true*, as the Critic *by parts* is miſled by both theſe errors.

He next deſcribes *true Wit*,

True Wit is Nature to advantage dreſs'd, &c.

And here the reader may obſerve, as in the foregoing, the poet is not only explaining *true Wit*, but likewiſe the *right diſpoſition* of it: And illuſtrating this, as he did the *wrong*, by ideas taken from the art of Painting.

NOTES.

VER. 299. *True Wit is Nature to advantage dreſs'd, &c.*] This definition is very exact. Mr. *Locke* had defined *Wit* to conſiſt *in the aſſemblage of ideas, and putting thoſe together, with quickneſs and variety, wherein can be found any reſemblance or congruity, whereby to make up pleaſant pictures and agreable viſions in the fancy.* But that great Philoſopher, in ſeparating *Wit* from *Judgment*, as he does in this place, has given us (and he could therefore give us no other) only an account of Wit in general: In which, falſe Wit, tho' not every ſpecies of it, is included. A *ſtriking image* therefore of Nature, is as Mr. *Locke* obſerves, certainly *Wit:* But this *image* may *ſtrike* on ſeveral accounts, as well as for its *truth* and *amiableneſs*; and the Philoſopher has explained the manner how. But it never becomes that

Something, whoſe truth convinc'd at ſight we find,
That gives us back the image of our mind.
As ſhades more ſweetly recommend the light,
So modeſt plainneſs ſets off ſprightly wit.
For works may have more wit than does 'em good,
As bodies periſh thro' exceſs of blood.
Others for *Language* all their care expreſs,
And value books, as women men, for Dreſs:

COMMENTARY.

VER. 305. *Others for Language, &c.*] He proceeds ſecondly to thoſe narrow Critics whoſe whole concern turns upon *Language*, and ſhews [from ℣ 304 to 337.] that this quality, where it holds the principal place, *deſerves no commendation*; becauſe it excludes qualities more eſſential. And when the abounding Verbiage has excluded the ſenſe, the writer has nothing to do but to hide the defect, by giving his words all the falſe colour and gilding he is able.

2. He ſhews that the Critic who buſies himſelf with this quality alone, is altogether *unable to make a right Judgment* of it; becauſe *true Expreſſion* is only the dreſs of Thought; and ſo, muſt be perpetually varied according to the ſubject and manner of thinking. But thoſe who never concern themſelves with the *Senſe*, can form no judgment of the correſpondence between *that* and the *Language:*

Expreſſion is the dreſs of thought, and ſtill
Appears more decent as more ſuitable, &c.

Now as theſe Critics are ſtrangers to all this ſkill, their whole judgment in Language

NOTES.

Wit which is the ornament of true Poeſy, whoſe end is to repreſent Nature, but when it *dreſſes that Nature to advantage*, and preſents her to us in the cleareſt and moſt taking light. And to know when *Wit* has done its office, the poet ſubjoins one admirable direction: *viz.* When we perceive that it *gives us back the image of our mind.* When it does that, we may be ſure it plays no tricks with us: For this *image* is the creature of the *Judgment*; and whenever *Wit* correſponds with *Judgment*, we may ſafely pronounce it to be *true.*

Naturam intueamur, hanc ſequamur: id facillimè accipiunt animi quod agnoſcunt. Quintil. lib. viii. c. 3.

Their praiſe is ſtill,—the Style is excellent:
The Senſe, they humbly take upon content.
Words are like leaves; and where they moſt abound,
Much fruit of ſenſe beneath is rarely found.
False Eloquence, like the Priſmatic glaſs,
Its gaudy colours ſpreads on ev'ry place;
The face of nature we no more ſurvey,
All glares alike, without diſtinction gay:
But true Expreſſion, like th' unchanging Sun,
Clears, and improves whate'er it ſhines upon,
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
Expreſſion is the dreſs of thought, and ſtill
Appears more decent, as more ſuitable;
A vile conceit in pompous words expreſs'd,
Is like a clown in regal purple dreſs'd:

COMMENTARY.

is reduced to the choice of *ſingle words*; the higheſt excellence of which is commonly thought to conſiſt in their being antique and obſolete. On which our author has therefore beſtow'd a little raillery; concluding with a ſhort and proper direction concerning the *uſe of words*, as far as regards their *novelty* and *antiquity*.

NOTES.

VER. 311. *False eloquence, like the priſmatic glaſs, &c.*] This ſimile is beautiful. For the falſe colouring, given to objects by the priſmatic glaſs, is owing to its untwiſting, by its *obliquities*, thoſe threads of light, which Nature had put together in order to ſpread over its works an ingenuous and ſimple *candor*, that ſhould not hide, but only heighten the native complexion of the objects. And *falſe Eloquence* is nothing elſe but the ſtraining and *divaricating* the parts of *true expreſſion*; and then daubing them over with what the Rhetoricians very properly term, *colours*; in lieu of that candid light, now loſt, which was reflected from them in their natural ſtate while ſincere and entire.

For diff'rent ſtyles with diff'rent ſubjects ſort,
As ſeveral garbs with country, town, and court.
Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phraſe, meer moderns in their ſenſe:
Such labour'd nothings, in ſo ſtrange a ſtyle,
Amaze th' unlearn'd, and make the learned ſmile.
Unlucky, as Fungoſo in the Play,
Theſe ſparks with aukward vanity diſplay
What the fine gentleman wore yeſterday;
And but ſo mimic ancient wits at beſt,
As apes our grandſires, in their doublets dreſt.
In words, as faſhions, the ſame rule will hold;
Alike fantaſtic, if too new, or old;
Be not the firſt by whom the new are try'd,
Nor yet the laſt to lay the old aſide.
But moſt by *Numbers* judge a Poet's ſong,
And ſmooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 337. *But moſt by* Numbers *judge, &c.*] The laſt ſort are thoſe [from ℣ 336 to 384.] whoſe ears are attached only to the *Harmony* of a poem. Of which they judge as ignorantly and as perverſely as the other ſort did of *Eloquence*; and for the very

NOTES.

VER. 324. *Some by old words, &c.*] *Abolita & abrogata retinere, inſolentiæ cujuſdam eſt, & frivolæ in parvis jactantiæ.* Quintil. lib. i. c. 6.

Opus eſt ut verba à vetuſtate repetita neque crebra ſint, neque manifeſta, quia nil eſt odioſius affectatione, nec utique ab ultimis repetita temporibus. Oratio cujus ſumma virtus eſt perſpicuitas, quam ſit vitioſa, ſi egeat interprete? Ergo ut novorum optima erunt maximè vetera, ita veterum maximè nova. Idem.

VER. 328. — *unlucky as* Fungoſo, *&c.*] *See* Ben. Johnſon's *Every Man in his Humour.*

In the bright Muſe tho' thouſand charms conſpire,
Her Voice is all theſe tuneful fools admire;
Who haunt Parnaſſus but to pleaſe their ear,
Not mend their minds; as ſome to Church repair,
Not for the doctrine, but the muſic there.
Theſe equal ſyllables alone require,
Tho' oft the ear the open vowels tire;
While expletives their feeble aid do join;
And ten low words oft' creep in one dull line;

COMMENTARY.

ſame reaſon. He *firſt* deſcribes that *falſe Harmony* with which they are ſo much captivated; and ſhews that it is wretchedly *flat* and *unvaried:* For

Smooth or rough with them is right or wrong.

He then deſcribes the *true.* 1. As it is in *itſelf*, *conſtant*; with a happy mixture of *ſtrength* and *ſweetneſs*, in contradiction to the *roughneſs* and *flatneſs* of falſe Harmony: And ſecondly, as it is *varied*, in compliance to the *ſubject*, where the *ſound becomes an echo to the ſenſe*, ſo far as is conſiſtent with the preſervation of numbers; in contradiction to the *monotony* of falſe Harmony: Of this he gives us, in the delivery of his precepts, four fine examples of *ſmoothneſs*, *roughneſs*, *ſlowneſs*, and *rapidity*. The *firſt* uſe of this correſpondence of the *ſound* to the *ſenſe*, is to aid the fancy in acquiring a perfecter and more lively image of the thing repreſented. A *ſecond* and nobler, is to calm and ſubdue the turbulent and ſelfiſh paſſions, and to raiſe and inflame the beneficent: Which he illuſtrates in the famous adventure of *Timotheus* and *Alexander*, and by referring to Mr. *Dryden's* Ode on that ſubject, turns it to a very high complement on that great poet.

NOTES.

VER. 337. *But moſt by Numbers, &c.*] *Quis populi ſermo eſt? quis enim? niſi carmine molli*
Nunc demum numero fluere, ut per læve ſeveros
Effundat junctura ungues: ſcit tendere verſum,
Non ſecus ac ſi oculo rubricam dirigat uno."
Perſius, Sat. 1.

VER. 345. *Tho' oft the ear, &c.*] *Fugiemus crebras vocalium concurſiones, quæ vaſtam atque hiantem orationem reddunt.* Cic. ad Heren. lib. iv. *Vide etiam* Quintil. lib. ix. c. 4.

While they ring round the ſame unvary'd chimes,
With ſure returns of ſtill expected rhymes.
Where-e'er you find "the cooling weſtern breeze,"
In the next line, it "whiſpers thro' the trees;"
If cryſtal ſtreams "with pleaſing murmurs creep,"
The reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with "ſleep."
Then, at the laſt and only couplet fraught
With ſome unmeaning thing they call a thought,
A needleſs Alexandrine ends the ſong,
That, like a wounded ſnake, drags its ſlow length along.
Leave ſuch to tune their own dull rhimes, and know
What's roundly ſmooth, or languiſhingly ſlow;
And praiſe the eaſy vigour of a line,
Where Denham's ſtrength, and Waller's ſweetneſs join.
True eaſe in writing comes from art, not chance,
As thoſe move eaſieſt who have learn'd to dance.
'Tis not enough no harſhneſs gives offence,
The ſound muſt ſeem an Echo to the ſenſe:
Soft is the ſtrain when Zephyr gently blows,
And the ſmooth ſtream in ſmoother numbers flows;

NOTES.

VER. 364. *'Tis not enough no harſhneſs gives offence;*
The ſound muſt ſeem an Echo to the ſenſe,] The judicious introduction of this precept is remarkable. The Poets, and even ſome of the beſt of them, while too intent to give this beauty of *making the ſound an Echo to the ſenſe*, fall ſometimes into an unharmonious diſſonance. But this is carrying a particular precept of the art into an extreme, that deſtroys one of the general principles of it, which is *Harmony*. The poet therefore, by the introductory line would inſinuate, that Harmony is always *preſuppoſed* as *obſerved*; tho' it may and ought to be perpetually varied, ſo as to expreſs the beauty above ſpoken of.

But when loud ſurges laſh the ſounding ſhoar,
The hoarſe, rough verſe ſhould like the torrent roar.
When Ajax ſtrives, ſome rock's vaſt weight to throw,
The line too labours, and the words move ſlow;
Not ſo, when ſwift Camilla ſcours the plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and ſkims along the main.
Hear how Timotheus' vary'd lays ſurprize,
And bid alternate paſſions fall and riſe!
While, at each change, the ſon of Libyan Jove
Now burns with glory, and then melts with love:
Now his fierce eyes with ſparkling fury glow,
Now ſighs ſteal out, and tears begin to flow:
Perſians and Greeks like turns of nature found,
And the World's victor ſtood ſubdu'd by Sound!
The pow'r of Muſic all our hearts allow,
And what Timotheus was, is DRYDEN now.
Avoid *Extremes*; and ſhun the fault of ſuch,
Who ſtill are pleas'd too little or too much.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 384. *Avoid extremes, &c.*] Our author is now come to the *laſt cauſe of wrong Judgment*, PARTIALITY; the parent of the immediately preceding cauſe, a *bounded capacity:* Nothing ſo much narrowing and contracting the mind as *prejudices* entertained for or againſt things or perſons. This, therefore, as the main root of all the foregoing, he proſecutes at large from ℣ 383 to 473.

Firſt he *previouſly* expoſes that capricious turn of mind, which, by running men

NOTES.

VER. 374. *Hear how* Timotheus, *&c.*] *See* Alexander's Feaſt, *or* the Power of Muſic; *an Ode by Mr.* Dryden.

At ev'ry trifle ſcorn to take offence,
That always ſhows great pride, or little ſenſe;
Thoſe heads, as ſtomachs, are not ſure the beſt,
Which nauſeate all, and nothing can digeſt.
Yet let not each gay Turn thy rapture move,
For fools admire, but men of ſenſe approve.
As things ſeem large which we thro' miſts deſcry,
Dulneſs is ever apt to magnify.
Some foreign writers, ſome our own deſpiſe;
The Ancients only, or the Moderns prize.
Thus Wit, like Faith, by each man is apply'd
To one ſmall ſect, and all are damn'd beſide.

COMMENTARY.

into *Extremes*, either of praiſe or diſpraiſe, lays the *foundation* of an *habitual partiality*. He cautions therefore both againſt one and the other; and ſhews that exceſs of *Praiſe* is the mark of a *bad taſte*, and exceſs of *Cenſure*, of a *bad digeſtion*.

VER. 394. *Some foreign writers, &c.*] Having explained the diſpoſition of mind which produces an *habitual partiality*, he proceeds to expoſe this *partiality* in all the ſhapes it appears in, both amongſt the *unlearned* and the *learned*.

I. In the *unlearned*, it is ſeen, 1. In an unreaſonable fondneſs for, or averſion to our *own* or *foreign*, to *ancient* or *modern* writers. And as it is the *mob* of unlearned readers he is here ſpeaking of, he expoſes their folly in a very appoſite ſimilitude:

Thus Wit, like Faith, by each Man is apply'd
To one ſmall ſect, and all are damn'd beſide.

But he ſhews that theſe Critics have as wrong a notion of *Reaſon* as thoſe Bigots have of *God:* For that Genius is not confined to times or climates; but, as the univerſal gift of Nature, is extended throughout all ages and countries: That indeed this intellectual light, like the material light of the Sun itſelf, may not always ſhine in every place with equal ſplendor; but be ſometimes *clouded* with *popular ignorance*, and ſometimes again *eclipſed* by the diſcountenance of *Princes*; yet it ſhall ſtill recover itſelf; and, by breaking thro' the ſtrongeſt of theſe impediments, manifeſt the eternity of its nature.

Meanly they ſeek the bleſſing to confine,
And force that ſun but on a part to ſhine,
Which not alone the ſouthern wit ſublimes,
But ripens ſpirits in cold northern climes;
Which from the firſt has ſhone on ages paſt,
Enlights the preſent, and ſhall warm the laſt:
Tho' each may feel encreaſes and decays,
And ſee now clearer and now darker days.
Regard not then if Wit be old or new,
But blame the falſe, and value ſtill the true.
Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
But catch the ſpreading notion of the town;
They reaſon and conclude by precedent,
And own ſtale nonſenſe which they ne'er invent.
Some judge of authors names, not works, and then
Nor praiſe nor blame the writings, but the men.
Of all this ſervile herd, the worſt is he
That in proud dulneſs joins with Quality.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 408. *Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own*] A ſecond inſtance of *unlearned partiality* is their going always along with the cry, as having no fixed or well grounded principles whereon to raiſe any judgment. A third is reverence for *names*; of which, as he well obſerves, the worſt and vileſt ſort, are the idolizers of *names of quality*; whom therefore he ſtigmatizes as they deſerve. Our author's *temper* as well as judgment is here very obſervable, in throwing this ſpecies of partiality amongſt the *unlearned* Critics: His affection for letters would not ſuffer him to conceive that any *learned* Critic could ever fall to ſo low a proſtitution.

A conſtant Critic at the great man's board,
To fetch and carry nonſenſe for my Lord.
What woful ſtuff this madrigal would be,
In ſome ſtarv'd hackney ſonneteer, or me?
But let a Lord once own the happy lines,
How the wit brightens! how the ſtyle refines!
Before his ſacred name flies ev'ry fault,
And each exalted ſtanza teems with thought!
The Vulgar thus through Imitation err;
As oft' the Learn'd by being ſingular;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 424. — *The Vulgar thus — As oft the Learn'd*—] II. He comes, in the *ſecond place*, to conſider the inſtances of *partiality* in the *learned*. 1. The firſt is *Singularity*. For, as want of principles, in the *unlearned*, neceſſitates them to reſt on the general judgment as *always right*; ſo adherence to falſe principles (that is, to *notions of their own*) draws the *learned* into the other extreme, of ſuppoſing the general judgment always *wrong*. And as, before, the poet compared *thoſe* to *Bigots*, who made true faith to conſiſt in believing after others; ſo he compares *theſe* to *Schiſmatics*, who make it to conſiſt in believing as no one ever believed before. Which folly he marks with a lively ſtroke of humour in the *turn* of the thought:

So Schiſmatics the plain believers quit,
And are but damn'd for having too much Wit.

2. The ſecond is *Novelty*. And as this, which he proſecutes from ℣ 429 to 452. proceeds ſometimes from *fondneſs*, ſometimes from *vanity*, he compares the *one* to the *paſſion for a miſtreſs*, ℣ 432. and the *other*, to the *pride of being in faſhion*, ℣ 446. But the excuſe common to both is, the *daily improvement of their Judgment*.

Aſk them the cauſe, they're wiſer ſtill they ſay.

Now as this is a plauſible pretence for their inconſtancy, and our author himſelf has afterwards laid down the thought, in a *precept* for a remedy againſt obſtinacy and pride, where he ſays,

℣ 570. *But you with pleaſure own your errors paſt,*
And make each day a critic on the laſt,

So much they ſcorn the croud, that if the throng
By chance go right, they purpoſely go wrong:
So Schiſmatics the plain believers quit,
And are but damn'd for having too much wit.
Some praiſe at morning what they blame at night;
But always think the laſt opinion right.
A Muſe by theſe is like a miſtreſs us'd,
This hour ſhe's idoliz'd, the next abus'd;
While their weak heads, like towns unfortify'd,
'Twixt ſenſe and nonſenſe daily change their ſide.
Aſk them the cauſe; they're wiſer ſtill, they ſay;
And ſtill to-morrow's wiſer than to-day.
We think our fathers fools, ſo wiſe we grow;
Our wiſer ſons, no doubt, will think us ſo.
Once School-divines this zealous iſle o'er-ſpread;
Who knew moſt Sentences, was deepeſt read;

COMMENTARY.

he has been careful, by the turn of the expreſſion in this place, to ſhew the difference. For *Time*, conſidered only as *duration*, vitiates as frequently as it improves. Therefore to expect wiſdom as the neceſſary attendant of *length of years* unrelated to *long experience*, is vain and deluſive. This he illuſtrates by a remarkable example; in which, we ſee *Time*, inſtead of becoming *wiſer*, deſtroying *good letters*, to ſubſtitute *ſchool divinity* in their place.—The *genius* of this kind of learning; the *character* of its profeſſors; and the *fate*, which, ſooner or later, always attends whatſoever is wrong or falſe, the poet ſums up in thoſe four lines;

Faith, Goſpel, all ſeem'd made to be diſputed, &c.

And in concluſion, he obſerves, that perhaps this miſchief, from love of *novelty*, might not be ſo great, did it not, with the *Critic*, infect *Authors* likewiſe; who, when they find their readers diſpoſed to take *ready Wit* on the ſtandard of *current Folly*, never trouble themſelves to make better payment.

Faith, Goſpel, all, ſeem'd made to be diſputed,
And none had ſenſe enough to be confuted:
Scotiſts and Thomiſts, now, in peace remain,
Amidſt their kindred cobwebs in Duck-lane.
If Faith itſelf has diff'rent dreſſes worn,
What wonder modes in Wit ſhould take their turn?
Oft', leaving what is natural and fit,
The current folly proves the ready wit;
And authors think their reputation ſafe,
Which lives as long as fools are pleas'd to laugh.
Some valuing thoſe of their own ſide or mind,
Still make themſelves the meaſure of mankind:

COMMENTARY.

VER. 452. *Some valuing thoſe of their own ſide or mind, &c.*] 3. The third and laſt inſtance of *partiality* in the *learned*, is *Party* and *Faction*. Which is conſider'd from ℣ 451 to 474. where he ſhews how men of this turn deceive themſelves when they load a writer of their own ſide with commendation. They fancy they are only paying tribute to *merit*, when they are all the while ſacrificing to *ſelf-love*. But this is not the worſt. He further ſhews, that this *party ſpirit* has often very ill effects on ſcience itſelf; while, in ſupport of *Faction*, it labours to depreſs ſome riſing genius that was, perhaps, kindled by nature, for the enlightening of his age and country.

NOTES.

VER. 444. *Scotiſts and Thomiſts*] Theſe were two parties amongſt the ſchoolmen, headed by *Duns Scotus* and *Thomas Aquinas*, of different opinions, and from that difference denominated *Realiſts* and *Nominaliſts*; they were perpetually diſputing on the ſubject of the *immaculate conception*; the firſt holding, the latter denying it.

VER. 445. *Duck-lane*] A place where old and ſecond-hand books were ſold formerly, near *Smithfield*.

Fondly we think we honour merit then,
When we but praiſe ourſelves in other men.
Parties in Wit attend on thoſe of State,
And public faction doubles private hate.
Pride, Malice, Folly, againſt Dryden roſe,
In various ſhapes of Parſons, Critics, Beaus;
But ſenſe ſurviv'd, when merry jeſts were paſt;
For riſing merit will buoy up at laſt.
Might he return, and bleſs once more our eyes,
New Blackmores and new Milbourns muſt ariſe:
Nay ſhould great Homer lift his awful head,
Zoilus again would ſtart up from the dead.
Envy will merit, as its ſhade, purſue;
But like a ſhadow, proves the ſubſtance true;
For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, makes known
Th' oppoſing body's groſſneſs, not its own.

COMMENTARY.

An obſervation finely inſinuating, that all the baſe and viler paſſions ſeek refuge and find ſupport in *party madneſs*.

NOTES.

VER. 470. *For envy'd Wit, like Sol eclips'd, &c.*] This ſimilitude implies a very remarkable *fact*; which (as the lines were almoſt prophetic) we need not ſeek abroad for an example of. It is, that frequently thoſe very writers, who have at firſt done all they could to obſcure and depreſs a riſing genius, have been at length reduced, in order to keep themſelves in ſome little credit, to borrow from him, imitate his manner, and reflect what they could of his ſplendor. Nor has the poet been leſs artful, to inſinuate alſo what is ſometimes the *cauſe*. A youthful genius, like the Sun riſing towards the Meridian, diſplays *too powerful*

When firſt that ſun too pow'rful beams diſplays,
It draws up vapours which obſcure its rays;
But ev'n thoſe clouds at laſt adorn its way,
Reflect new glories, and augment the day.
Be thou the firſt true merit to befriend;
His praiſe is loſt, who ſtays 'till all commend.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 474. *Be thou the firſt, &c.*] The poet having now gone thro' the laſt cauſe of *wrong Judgment*, and root of all the reſt, namely, *Partiality*; and ended it with the higheſt inſtances of it, in *party-rage* and *envy*; this affords him an opportunity of cloſing his *ſecond diviſion* in the moſt graceful manner, by concluding from the premiſſes, and calling upon the TRUE CRITIC to be careful of his *charge*, which is the *protection* and *ſupport* of *Wit*. For, the defence of it from malevolent cenſure is its true protection; and the illuſtration of its beauties, its true ſupport.

He firſt ſhews the Critic ought to do this ſervice without delay: And on theſe motives. 1. *Out of regard to himſelf:* For there is *ſome* merit in giving the world notice of an excellence; but *none at all* in pointing out to that which has been long the admiration of men. 2. *Out of regard to the Poem:* For the ſhort duration of modern works requires they ſhould begin to *enjoy their exiſtence* early. He compares the life of *modern Wit*, and *ancient* which ſurvives in an univerſal language, to the difference between the Patriarchal age and our own: And obſerves, that while the *ancient* writings live for ever, as it were in braſs and marble, the *modern* are but like *Paintings*, which, of how maſterly a hand ſoever, have no ſooner gained their requiſite perfection by the ripening of their ſoftened and incorporated colouring, which they do in a very few years, but they begin preſently to fade and dye away. 3. Laſtly our author ſhews that the Critic ought to do this ſervice *out of regard to the Poet*; when he conſiders the ſlender dowry the Muſe brings along with her. In *youth* 'tis only a ſhort lived vanity; and in *maturer years* an acceſs of care and labour, in proportion to the weight of

NOTES.

beams for inferior writers, which occaſions their *gathering*, *condenſing*, and *blackening*. But as he deſcends from the Meridian (the time when the Sun gives its *gilding* to the ſurrounding clouds) his beams grow milder, his heat more benign, and then

— ev'n thoſe Clouds at laſt adorn its way,
Reflect new glories, and augment the day.

Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes,
And 'tis but juſt to let them live betimes.
No longer now that golden age appears,
When Patriarch-wits ſurviv'd a thouſand years:
Now length of Fame (our ſecond life) is loſt,
And bare threeſcore is all ev'n that can boaſt;
Our ſons their fathers failing language ſee,
And ſuch as Chaucer is, ſhall Dryden be.
So when the faithful pencil has deſign'd
Some bright Idea of the maſter's mind,
Where a new world leaps out at his command,
And ready Nature waits upon his hand;
When the ripe colours ſoften and unite,
And ſweetly melt into juſt ſhade and light,

COMMENTARY.

Reputation to be ſuſtained, and the increaſe of Envy to be oppoſed: And concludes his reaſoning therefore on this head, with that pathetic and inſinuating addreſs to the Critic, from ℣ 508 to 524.

Ah! let not learning, &c.

NOTES.

VER. 484. *So when the faithful pencil, &c.*] This ſimilitude in which the poet diſcovers (as he always does on this ſubject) *real ſcience* in the thing ſpoken of, has ſtill a more peculiar beauty, as at the ſame time that it confeſſes the juſt ſuperiority of *ancient* writings, it inſinuates one advantage the *modern* have above them; which is this, that in theſe, our intimate acquaintance with the *occaſion of writing*, and the *manners deſcribed*, let us into all thoſe living and ſtriking graces which may be well compared to that perfection of imitation which only *colouring* can give: While the ravage of Time amongſt the monuments of former ages, hath left us but the groſs ſubſtance of ancient wit, ſo much of the form and matter of body only as may be expreſſed in braſs or marble.

When mellowing years their full perfection give,
And each bold figure juſt begins to live;
The treach'rous colours the fair art betray,
And all the bright creation fades away!
Unhappy Wit, like moſt miſtaken things,
Attones not for that envy which it brings.
In youth alone its empty praiſe we boaſt,
But ſoon the ſhort-liv'd vanity is loſt:
Like ſome fair flow'r the early ſpring ſupplies,
That gayly blooms, but ev'n in blooming dies.
What is this Wit, which muſt our cares employ?
The owner's wife, that other men enjoy;
Then moſt our trouble ſtill when moſt admir'd,
And ſtill the more we give, the more requir'd;
Whoſe fame with pains we guard, but loſe with eaſe,
Sure ſome to vex, but never all to pleaſe;
'Tis what the vicious fear, the virtuous ſhun,
By fools 'tis hated, and by knaves undone!
If Wit ſo much from Ign'rance undergo,
Ah let not Learning too commence its foe!
Of old, thoſe met rewards who could excel,
And ſuch were prais'd who but endeavour'd well:
Tho' triumphs were to gen'rals only due,
Crowns were reſerv'd to grace the ſoldiers too.
Now, they who reach Parnaſſus' lofty crown,
Employ their pains to ſpurn ſome others down;

And while ſelf-love each jealous writer rules,
Contending wits become the ſport of fools:
But ſtill the worſt with moſt regret commend,
For each ill Author is as bad a Friend.
To what baſe ends, and by what abject ways,
Are mortals urg'd thro' ſacred luſt of praiſe!
Ah ne'er ſo dire a thirſt of glory boaſt,
Nor in the Critic let the Man be loſt.
Good-nature and good-ſenſe muſt ever join;
To err is human, to forgive, divine.
But if in noble minds ſome dregs remain
Not yet purg'd off, of ſpleen and ſour diſdain;

COMMENTARY.

VER. 526. *But if in noble minds ſome dregs remain, &c.*] So far as to what ought to be the *true Critic*'s principal concern and employment. But if the ſour critical humour muſt needs have a vent, he points to its right object; and ſhews how it may be uſefully and innocently diverted. This is very obſervable; for our author makes *pride* and *ſpleen* the characteriſtics of the *falſe Critic*, and yet here ſuppoſes them inherent in the *true*. But it is done with judgment, and a knowledge of nature. For *ſpleen* and *diſdain*, in the critical mind, are the ſame as bitterneſs and acerbity in unripe fruits; the foundation and capacity of that high ſpirit, race, and flavour which we find in the beſt of them, when perfectly concocted by the heat and influence of the Sun; and which, without thoſe qualities, would often gain no more by that influence than only a *mellow inſipidity*. In like manner, natural acerbity in the true Critic, improved by long ſtudy and experience, ripens into an exactneſs of Judgment and an elegance of Taſte: But, lying remote from the influence of good letters, continues, in the *falſe Critic*, in all its firſt offenſive harſhneſs and aſtringency. The Poet therefore ſhews how, after the exaltation of theſe qualities into the ſtate of *perfect Criticiſm*, the very *Dregs*, which poſſibly may remain even in *a noble mind*, may be uſefully employed, namely in branding OBSCENITY and IMPIETY. Of theſe he explains the riſe and progreſs, in a beautiful picture of the different genius's of the reigns of *Charles* II. and *William* III. the former of which gave courſe to the moſt *profligate luxury*; the latter to a *licencious impiety*. Theſe are the criminals the poet aſſigns

Diſcharge that rage on more provoking crimes,
Nor fear a dearth in theſe flagitious times.
No pardon vile Obſcenity ſhould find,
Tho' wit and art conſpire to move your mind;
But Dulneſs with obſcenity muſt prove
As ſhameful ſure as Impotence in love.
In the fat age of pleaſure, wealth, and eaſe,
Sprung the rank weed, and thriv'd with large increaſe;
When love was all an eaſy Monarch's care;
Seldom at council, never in a war:
Jilts rul'd the ſtate, and ſtateſmen farces writ;
Nay wits had penſions, and young Lords had wit:
The Fair ſate panting at a Courtier's play,
And not a Maſk went unimprov'd away:
The modeſt fan was lifted up no more,
And Virgins ſmil'd at what they bluſh'd before.

COMMENTARY.

over to the cauſtic hand of the Critic, but concludes however with this neceſſary admonition, to take care not to be miſled into unjuſt cenſure; either on the one hand, by a *phariſaical niceneſs*, or on the other by a guilty conſciouſneſs. And thus the *ſecond diviſion* of his Eſſay ends. The judicious conduct of which part is worthy our obſervation. The ſubject of it are the *cauſes of wrong Judgment:* Theſe he derives upwards from *cauſe* to *cauſe*, till he brings them to their ſource, an *immoral partiality*. For as he had, in the firſt part,

—*trac'd the Muſes upward to their ſpring*,

and ſhewn them to be derived from Heaven, and the offspring of virtue; ſo hath he *here* purſued this enemy of the Muſes, the *bad Critic*, to his low original, in the arms of his nurſing mother *Immorality*. This order naturally *introduces*, and at the ſame time ſhews the *neceſſity* of, the ſubject of the third and laſt diviſion, which is, on the *Morals of the Critic*.

The following licence of a Foreign reign
Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain;
Then unbelieving Prieſts reform'd the nation,
And taught more pleaſant methods of ſalvation;
Where Heav'n's free ſubjects might their rights diſpute,
Leſt God himſelf ſhould ſeem too abſolute:
Pulpits their ſacred ſatire learn'd to ſpare,
And Vice admir'd to find a flatt'rer there!
Encourag'd thus, Wit's Titans brav'd the ſkies,
And the preſs groan'd with licens'd blaſphemies.
Theſe monſters, Critics! with your darts engage,
Here point your thunder, and exhauſt your rage!
Yet ſhun their fault, who, ſcandalouſly nice,
Will needs miſtake an author into vice;
All ſeems infected that th' infected ſpy,
As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye.

NOTES.

VER. 545. *Did all the dregs of bold Socinus drain*] The ſeeds of this *religious* evil, as well as of the *political* that encouraged it (for all *Revolutions* are in themſelves evils, tho' brought about thro' neceſſity, for the removal of greater) were ſown in the preceeding *fat age of pleaſure*. The miſchiefs done, during Cromwell's uſurpation, by fanaticiſm, inflamed by erroneous and abſurd notions of the doctrine of *grace* and *ſatisfaction*, made the loyal *Latitudinarian* divines (as they were called) at the Reſtoration, go ſo far into the other extreme of reſolving all Chriſtianity into *Morality*, as to afford an eaſy introduction to *Socinianiſm*: Which in that reign (founded on the principles of Liberty) men had full opportunity of propagating.

VER. 546. *The author has omitted two lines which ſtood here, as containing a* National Reflection, *which in his ſtricter judgment he could not but diſapprove, on any People whatever.*

LEARN then what MORALS Critics ought to ſhow,
For 'tis but half a Judge's task, to know.
'Tis not enough, taſte, judgment, learning, join;
In all you ſpeak, let truth and candour ſhine:

COMMENTARY.

VER. 560. *Learn then*, &c.] We enter now on the *third part*, the MORALS of the *Critic*. There ſeem'd a peculiar neceſſity of inculcating precepts of this ſort to the *Critic*, by reaſon of that native *acerbity* ſo often found in the profeſſion; of which, a ſhort memorial will ſoon convince the reader, and at the ſame time inform him why our author has here included all *critical morals* in CANDOUR, MODESTY, and GOOD BREEDING. When, in theſe latter ages, *human learning* rear'd its head in the Weſt, and its tail, *verbal Criticiſm*, was of courſe to riſe with it; the madneſs of *Critics* preſently became ſo offenſive, that the ſober ſtupidity of the monks might appear the more tolerable evil. *J. Argyropylus* a mercenary Greek, who came to teach ſchool in *Italy* after the ſacking *Conſtantinople* by the *Turk*, uſed to maintain that *Cicero* underſtood neither *Philoſophy* nor *Greek*; while another of his countrymen, *J. Laſcaris* by name, threatened to demonſtrate that *Virgil was no poet*. However theſe men raiſed in the weſt of *Europe* an appetite for the Greek language. So that *Hermolaus Barbarus*, a noted Critic and moſt paſſionate admirer of it, uſed to boaſt that he had invoked and raiſed the Devil, about the meaning of the Ariſtotelian ΕΝΤΕΛΕΧΕΙΑ. As this man was famous for his *enchantments*, ſo one, whom *Balzac* ſpeaks of, was as uſeful to letters by his *revelations*; and was wont to ſay, that the meaning of ſuch a verſe in Perſius, *no one knew but God and himſelf*. But they were not all ſo modeſt: The celebrated *Pomponius Lætus*, in exceſs of veneration for antiquity, became a real pagan, raiſed altars to *Romulus*, and ſacrificed to the Gods of *Greece*. But if the *Greeks* cried down *Cicero*, the *Italian* Critics knew how to ſupport his credit. Every one has heard of the childiſh exceſſes into which the fondneſs for being thought *Ciceronians* carried the moſt celebrated *Italians* of this time. They generally abſtained from reading the Scripture for fear of ſpoiling their ſtyle: And

NOTES.

VER. 560. *For 'tis but half a judge's part to know*, &c.] The Critic acts in two capacities, of *aſſeſſor* or qualificator, and of *judge*. In the firſt, a *ſcientific* character is ſufficient; but the laſt requires a *moral* one.

That not alone what to your ſenſe is due
All may allow; but ſeek your friendſhip too.
Be ſilent always when you doubt your ſenſe;
And ſpeak, tho' ſure, with ſeeming diffidence:

COMMENTARY.

Cardinal *Bembo* uſed to call the epiſtles of St. *Paul* by the contemptuous name of *Epiſtolaccias, great over-grown epiſtles.* But *Eraſmus* cured this frenzy in that maſter-piece of good ſenſe, intitled *Ciceronianus:* For which, as Lunatics treat their Phyſicians, the *elder Scaliger* inſulted him with all the brutal fury peculiar to his family and profeſſion. His ſon *Joſeph* and *Salmaſius* had indeed ſuch endowments of nature and art as might have made them public bleſſings; yet how did theſe ſavages and their adverſaries tear and worry one another! The choiceſt of *Joſeph*'s flowers of ſpeech were *Stercus Diaboli*, and *Lutum ſtercore maceratum.* It is true, theſe were ſtrown upon his enemies, he treated his friends better: For in a letter to *Thuanus*, ſpeaking of two of them, *Clavius* and *Lipſius*, he calls the firſt *a monſter of ignorance*; and the other *a ſlave to the Jeſuites*, and an *Idiot.* But ſo great was his love of *ſacred amity*, that he ſays at the ſame time, *I ſtill keep up a correſpondence with him notwithſtanding his Idiotry, for it is my principle to be conſtant in my friendſhips.— Je ne reſte de luy eſcrire, nonobſtant ſon Idioterie, d'autant que je ſuis conſtant en amitie.* The character he gives of *his own work*, in the ſame letter, is no leſs extraordinary: *Vous vous pouvez aſſurer que noſtre Euſebe ſera un treſor des merveilles de la doctrine Chronologique.* But this modeſt account of his *Chronology* is a trifle in compariſon of the juſt eſteem *Salmaſius* conceived of himſelf, as Mr. *Colomies* tells the ſtory. This Critic one day meeting two of his brethren, Meſſ. *Gaulmin* and *Mauſſac*, in the royal library at *Paris*, *Gaulmin*, in a virtuous conſciouſneſs of their importance, told the other two, that he believed *they three could make head againſt all the Learned in Europe:* To which the *great Salmaſius* fiercely replied, *Do you and Mr. Mauſſac join yourſelves to all that is learned in the world, and you ſhall find that I alone am a match for you all. Voſſius* tells us that, when *Laur. Valla* had ſnarl'd at every name of the firſt order in antiquity, ſuch as *Ariſtotle*, *Cicero*, and *one* whom I ſhould have thought this Critic was likelieſt to paſs by, the redoubtable *Priſcian*, he impiouſly boaſted that he had arms even againſt *Chriſt* himſelf. But *Codrus Urcæus* went further, and actually uſed thoſe arms the other only threatened with. This man while he was preparing ſome trifling piece of Criticiſm for the preſs, had the misfortune to hear his papers were burned: On which, he is reported to have broke out,— *Quodnam ego tantum ſcelus concepi, O Chriſte; quem ego tuorum unquam*

Some poſitive, perſiſting fops we know,
Who, if once wrong, will needs be always ſo;
But you, with pleaſure own your errors paſt,
And make each day a Critic on the laſt.

COMMENTARY.

læſi, ut ita inexpiabili in me odio debaccheris; *audi ea quæ tibi mentis compos & ex animo dicam. Si forte, cum ad ultimum vitæ finem pervenero, ſupplex accedam ad te oratum, neve audias, neve inter tuos accipias oro; cum infernis Diis in æternum vitam agere decrevi.* Whereupon, ſays my author, he quitted the converſe of men, threw himſelf into the thickeſt of a foreſt, and there wore out the wretched remains of life in all the agonies of deſpair.

But to return to the poem. This third and laſt *part* is in two diviſions. In the *firſt* of which [from ℣ 559 to 631.] he inculcates the *morals* by *precept:* In the *ſecond* [from ℣ 630 to the end] by *example.* His firſt precept [from ℣ 561 to 566.] recommends CANDOUR, for its *uſe to the Critic*, and *to the writer criticiſed.* The *ſecond* [from ℣ 567 to 574.] recommends MODESTY, which manifeſts itſelf by theſe four *ſigns:* 1. Silence where it doubts,

Be ſilent always where you doubt your ſenſe,

2. A ſeeming diffidence where it knows,

And ſpeak, tho' ſure, with ſeeming diffidence;

3. A free confeſſion of error where wrong,

But you with pleaſure own your errors paſt,

4. And a conſtant review and ſcrutiny even of thoſe opinions which it ſtill thinks right:

And make each day a Critic on the laſt.

3. The *third* [from ℣ 573 to 584.] recommends GOOD BREEDING, whoſe art conſiſts not in dogmatically obtruding truth upon men as *ignorant* of it, but in gently inſinuating it into them as not *ſufficiently attentive* to it. But as *men of breeding* are liable to two *oppoſite extremes*, he prudently cautions againſt both of them. The one is a *backwardneſs in communicating* their knowledge out of a falſe delicacy, and fear of being thought *Pedants:* The other, and much more common extreme in *men of breeding*, is a *mean complacence*, which ſuch as are worthy of your advice do not want to make it acceptable; for thoſe can beſt bear reproof in *particular points*, who beſt deſerve commendation in *general.*

'Tis not enough, your counſel ſtill be true;
Blunt truths more miſchief than nice falſhoods do;
Men muſt be taught as if you taught them not,
And things unknown propos'd as things forgot.
Without Good Breeding, truth is diſapprov'd;
That only makes ſuperior ſenſe belov'd.
Be niggards of advice on no pretence;
For the worſt avarice is that of ſenſe.
With mean complacence ne'er betray your truſt,
Nor be ſo civil as to prove unjuſt.
Fear not the anger of the wiſe to raiſe;
Thoſe beſt can bear reproof, who merit praiſe.
'Twere well might Critics ſtill this freedom take;
But Appius reddens at each word you ſpeak,

COMMENTARY.

VER. 484. *'Twere well might Critics, &c.*] The poet having thus recommended, in theſe *general rules of Conduct* for the *Judgment*, the *three critical Virtues* to the *heart*; ſhews next [from ℣ 583 to 631.] on what three ſort of Writers theſe Virtues, together with the advice conveyed under them, would be quite thrown away, and, which is worſe, would be repaid with obloquy and ſlander. Theſe are the *falſe Critic*, the *dull Man of Quality*, and the *bad Poet*; each of which *incorrigible* Writers he has very juſtly and exactly characterized.

But having drawn the laſt of them at large, and being always attentive to his main ſubject, which is *of writing* and *judging well*, he reaſſumes the character of the *bad Critic* (whom he had but touched upon before) to contraſt him with the other, and makes the *Characteriſtic* common to both, to be a never-ceaſing *Repetition* of their own impertinence.

The *Poet*,—*ſtill runs on in a raging vein, &c.* ℣ 606, *&c.*
The *Critic*—*with his own tongue ſtill edifies his ears*, ℣ 614, *&c.*

Than which there cannot be an obſervation more juſt, or more grounded on experience.

And ſtares, tremendous, with a threat'ning eye,
Like ſome fierce Tyrant in old tapeſtry.
Fear moſt to tax an Honourable fool,
Whoſe right it is, uncenſur'd to be dull;
Such, without wit, are Poets when they pleaſe,
As without learning they can take Degrees.
Leave dang'rous truths to unſucceſsful Satyrs,
And flattery to fulſome Dedicators,
Whom, when they praiſe, the world believes no more,
Than when they promiſe to give ſcribbling o'er.
'Tis beſt ſometimes your cenſure to reſtrain,
And charitably let the dull be vain:
Your ſilence there is better than your ſpite,
For who can rail ſo long as they can write?
Still humming on, their drouzy courſe they keep,
And laſh'd ſo long, like tops, are laſh'd aſleep.
Falſe ſteps but help them to renew the race,
As, after ſtumbling, Jades will mend their pace.
What crouds of theſe, impenitently bold,
In ſounds and jingling ſyllables grown old,

NOTES.

VER. 586. *And ſtares tremendous, &c.*] This picture was taken to himſelf by *John Dennis*, a furious old Critic by profeſſion, who, upon no other provocation, wrote againſt this Eſſay and its author, in a manner perfectly lunatic: For, as to the mention made of him in ℣ 270. he took it as a Compliment, and ſaid it was treacherouſly meant to cauſe him to overlook this *Abuſe* of his *Perſon*.

Still run on Poets, in a raging vein,
Ev'n to the dregs and ſqueezings of the brain,
Strain out the laſt dull droppings of their ſenſe,
And rhyme with all the rage of Impotence.
Such ſhameleſs Bards we have; and yet 'tis true,
There are as mad, abandon'd Critics too.
The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head,
With his own tongue ſtill edifies his ears,
And always liſt'ning to himſelf appears.
All books he reads, and all he reads aſſails,
From Dryden's Fables down to Durfey's Tales.
With him, moſt authors ſteal their works, or buy;
Garth did not write his own Diſpenſary.
Name a new Play, and he's the Poet's friend,
Nay ſhow'd his faults—but when wou'd Poets mend?
No place ſo ſacred from ſuch fops is barr'd,
Nor is Paul's church more ſafe than Paul's church yard:
Nay, fly to Altars; there they'll talk you dead:
For Fools ruſh in where Angels fear to tread.

NOTES.

VER. 619. *Garth did not write, &c.*] A common ſlander at that time in prejudice of that deſerving author. Our poet did him this juſtice, when that ſlander moſt prevail'd; and it is now (perhaps the ſooner for this very verſe) dead and forgotten.

Diſtruſtful ſenſe with modeſt caution ſpeaks,
It ſtill looks home, and ſhort excurſions makes;
But rattling nonſenſe in full vollies breaks,
And never ſhock'd, and never turn'd aſide,
Burſts out, reſiſtleſs, with a thund'ring tide.
But where's the man, who counſel can beſtow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiaſs'd, or by favour, or by ſpite:
Not dully prepoſſeſs'd, nor blindly right;
Tho' learn'd, well-bred; and tho' well-bred, ſincere;
Modeſtly bold, and humanly ſevere:
Who to a friend his faults can freely ſhow,
And gladly praiſe the merit of a foe?

COMMENTARY.

VER. 631. *But where's the man, &c.*] II. The concluſion of the *firſt diviſion* of this part, naturally leads him to the *ſecond*; which is of the Morals of Critics by *example*. For, having there drawn at large the *bad Critic*, he breaks out into an apoſtrophe, containing an exact and finiſhed character of the *true Critic*; which is, at the ſame time, the moſt eaſy and proper introduction to *this ſecond diviſion*. For, having aſked [from ℣ 630 to 643.] *Where's the man, &c.* he anſwers [from ℣ 642 to 735.] 1. That he was principally to be found in the happier ages of *Greece* and *Rome*; in the perſons of *Ariſtotle* and *Horace*, *Dionyſius* and *Petronius*, *Quintilian* and *Petronius*. Whoſe features [from ℣ 642 to 681.] he has not only exactly delineated, but contraſted with a peculiar elegance; the profound ſcience and *logical method* of *Ariſtotle* being oppoſed to the plain *common ſenſe* of *Horace*, conveyed in a natural and familiar *negligence*; the *ſtudy* and *refinement* of *Dionyſius*, to the *gay* and *courtly eaſe* of *Petronius*; and the *gravity* and *minuteneſs* of *Quintilian*, to the *vivacity* and *general topics* of *Longinus*. Nor has the poet been leſs careful, in theſe *examples*, to point out their eminence in the ſeveral *critical Virtues* he ſo carefully inculcated in his *precepts*. Thus in *Horace* he particularizes his *Candour*, in *Petronius* his *Good Breeding*, in *Quintilian* his *free* and *copious Inſtruction*, and in *Longinus* his *noble Spirit*.

Bleſt with a taſte exact, yet unconfin'd;
A knowledge both of books and human kind;
Gen'rous converſe; a ſoul exempt from pride;
And love to praiſe, with reaſon on his ſide?
Such once were Critics; ſuch the happy few,
Athens and Rome in better ages knew.
The mighty Stagirite firſt left the ſhore,
Spread all his ſails, and durſt the deeps explore;
He ſteer'd ſecurely, and diſcover'd far,
Led by the light of the Mæonian Star.
Poets, a race long unconfin'd, and free,
Still fond and proud of ſavage liberty,

NOTES.

VER. 642. *And love to praiſe with reaſon on his ſide?*] Not *only* on his *ſide*, but actually exerciſed in his *ſervice*. That Critic makes but a mean figure, who when he has found out the excellencies of his author, contents himſelf in offering them to the world, with only empty exclamations on their beauties. His office is to explain the nature of thoſe beauties, ſhew from whence they ariſe, and what effects they produce; or, in the better and fuller expreſſion of the poet,

To teach the world with Reaſon *to admire.*

Between ℣ 646 and 647. I found the following lines, ſince ſuppreſt by the author:

That bold Columbus *of the realms of wit,*
Whoſe firſt diſcov'ry's not exceeded yet.
Led by the light of the Mæonian Star,
He ſteer'd ſecurely, and diſcover'd far.
He, when all Nature *was ſubdu'd before,*
Like his great Pupil, ſigh'd, and long'd for more:
Fancy's wild regions *yet unvanquiſh'd lay,*
A boundleſs empire, and that own'd no ſway.
Poets, &c.

Receiv'd his laws; and ſtood convinc'd 'twas fit
Who conquer'd Nature, ſhould preſide o'er Wit.
Horace ſtill charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into ſenſe,
Will, like a friend, familiarly convey
The trueſt notions in the eaſieſt way.
He, who ſupreme in judgment, as in wit,
Might boldly cenſure, as he boldly writ,
Yet judg'd with coolneſs, tho' he ſung with fire;
His Precepts teach but what his works inſpire.
Our Critics take a contrary extreme,
They judge with fury, but they write with fle'me:
Nor ſuffers Horace more in wrong Tranſlations
By Wits, than Critics in as wrong Quotations.
See Dionyſius Homer's thoughts refine,
And call new beauties forth from ev'ry line!

NOTES.

VER. 652. *Who conquer'd Nature ſhould preſide o'er Wit.*] By this is not meant *phyſical* Nature, but *moral*. The force of the obſervation conſiſts in our underſtanding it in this ſenſe. For the poet not only uſes the word *Nature* for *human nature*, throughout this poem; but alſo, where in the beginning of it he lays down the principles of the arts he treats of, he makes the knowledge of *human nature* the foundation of all *Criticiſm* and *Poetry*. Nor is the obſervation leſs true than appoſite. For, *Ariſtotle*'s *natural* enquiries were ſuperficial, and ill made, tho' extenſive: But his *logical* and *moral* works are incomparable. In theſe he has unfolded the human mind, and laid open all the receſſes of the heart and underſtanding; and by his *Categories*, not only *conquered Nature*, but kept her in *tenfold chains:* Not as *Dulneſs* kept the Muſes, in the *Dunciad*, to ſilence them; but as *Ariſtæus* held *Proteus* in *Virgil*, to deliver Oracles.

Fancy and art in gay Petronius pleaſe,
The ſcholar's learning, with the courtier's eaſe.
In grave Quintilian's copious work, we find
The juſteſt rules, and cleareſt method join'd:
Thus uſeful arms in magazines we place,
All rang'd in order, and diſpos'd with grace,
But leſs to pleaſe the eye, than arm the hand,
Still fit for uſe, and ready at command.
Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inſpire,
And bleſs their Critic with a Poet's fire.
An ardent Judge, who zealous in his truſt,
With warmth gives ſentence, yet is always juſt;
Whoſe own example ſtrengthens all his laws,
And is himſelf that great Sublime he draws.
Thus long ſucceeding Critics juſtly reign'd,
Licence repreſs'd, and uſeful laws ordain'd.

COMMENTARY.

VER. 681. *Thus long ſucceeding Critics, &c.*] 2. The *next period* in which the true Critic (he tells us) appear'd, was at the revival and reſtoration of letters in the Weſt. This occaſions his giving a ſhort hiſtory [from ℣ 682 to 711.] of the decline and reeſtabliſhment of arts and ſciences in *Italy*. He ſhews that they both fell under the ſame enemy, *deſpotic power*; and that when both had made ſome little efforts to reſtore themſelves, they were ſoon quite overwhelmed by a *ſecond deluge* of another kind, *Superſtition*; and a calm of Dulneſs finiſh'd upon *Rome* and Letters what the rage of Barbariſm had begun:

A ſecond deluge *learning thus o'er-run,*
And the Monk *finiſh'd what the* Goth *begun.*

When things had been long in this condition, and all recovery now appear'd deſperate, it was a CRITIC, our author ſhews us, for the honour of the *Art* he here

Learning and Rome alike in empire grew;
And Arts ſtill follow'd where her Eagles flew:
From the ſame foes, at laſt, both felt their doom,
And the ſame age ſaw Learning fall, and Rome.
With Tyranny, then Superſtition join'd,
As that the body, this enſlav'd the mind;
Much was believ'd, but little underſtood,
And to be dull was conſtru'd to be good;
A ſecond deluge Learning thus o'er-run,
And the Monks finiſh'd what the Goths begun.
At length Eraſmus, that great, injur'd name,
(The glory of the Prieſthood, and the ſhame!)

COMMENTARY.

teaches, who at length broke the charm of dulneſs, diſſipated the inchantment, and, like another *Hercules*, drove thoſe cowl' d and *hooded ſerpents* from the *Heſperian* tree of knowledge, which they had ſo long guarded from human approach.

VER. 693. *At length* Eraſmus, *&c.*] Nothing can be conceived more artful than the application of his *example*; or more happy than the turn of compliment to this im-

NOTES.

Between ℣ 690 and 691. the author omitted theſe two,

Vain Wits and Critics were no more allow'd,
When none but Saints *had licence to be proud.*

VER. 694. *The glory of the Prieſthood and the ſhame!*] Our author elſewhere gives us to underſtand what he eſteems to be the *glory of the Prieſthood* as well as of a Chriſtian in general, where comparing himſelf to *Eraſmus*, he ſays,

In moderation *placing all my glory*,

and conſequently, what he eſteems to be the *ſhame* of it. The whole of this character belong'd moſt eminently and almoſt ſolely to *Eraſmus:* For all the other Reformers, ſuch as *Luther*, *Calvin*, and their followers, underſtood ſo little in what true Chriſtian Liberty conſiſted, that they carried with them, into the churches they founded, that very ſpirit of *perſecution*, which had drove them from the church they left.

Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,
And drove thoſe holy Vandals off the ſtage.
But ſee! each Muſe, in LEO's golden days,
Starts from her trance, and trims her wither'd bays!
Rome's ancient Genius, o'er its ruins ſpread,
Shakes off the duſt, and rears his rev'rend head.
Then Sculpture and her ſiſter-arts revive;
Stones leap'd to form, and rocks began to live;
With ſweeter notes each riſing Temple rung;
A Raphael painted, and a Vida ſung.
Immortal Vida: on whoſe honour'd brow
The Poet's bays and Critic's ivy grow:
Cremona now ſhall ever boaſt thy name,
As next in place to Mantua, next in fame!
But ſoon by impious arms from Latium chas'd,
Their ancient bounds the baniſh'd Muſes paſs'd;

COMMENTARY.

mortal man. And, to throw glory quite round his illuſtrious character, he makes it to be (as in fact it really was) by his aſſiſtance chiefly, that *Leo* was enabled to reſtore letters and the fine arts, in his Pontificate.

VER. 697. *But ſee each Muſe in* Leo's *golden days*] This brings us to that *ſecond period* in which the *true Critic* appear'd; of whom he has given us a *perfect idea* in the ſingle example of *Marcus Hieronymus Vida:* For his *ſubject* being *poetical Criticiſm*, for the uſe principally of a *critical Poet*; his *example* is an eminent *poetical Critic*, who had written of that Art in verſe.

VER. 709. *But ſoon by* impious arms, *&c.*] This is the third period, after learning had ſtill travelled farther Weſt; when the arms of the *Emperor*, in the ſack of *Rome* by the duke of *Bourbon*, had drove it out of *Italy*, and forced it to paſs the *Mountains*—The Examples he gives in this period, are of *Boileau* in *France*, and of the lord *Roſcommon* and the duke of *Buckingham* in *England:* And theſe

Thence Arts o'er all the northern world advance;
But Critic learning flouriſh'd moſt in France:
The rules, a nation born to ſerve, obeys;
And Boileau ſtill in right of Horace ſways.
But we, brave Britons, foreign laws deſpis'd,
And kept unconquer'd, and unciviliz'd;
Fierce for the liberties of wit, and bold,
We ſtill defy'd the Romans, as of old.
Yet ſome there were, among the ſounder few
Of thoſe who leſs preſum'd, and better knew,
Who durſt aſſert the juſter ancient cauſe,
And here reſtor'd Wit's fundamental laws.
Such was the Muſe, whoſe rules and practice tell,
" Nature's chief Maſter-piece is writing well."
Such was Roſcommon, not more learn'd than good,
With manners gen'rous as his noble blood;
To him the wit of Greece and Rome was known,
And ev'ry author's merit, but his own.

COMMENTARY.

were all Poets as well as Critics in verſe. It is true, the laſt inſtance is of one who was no eminent poet, the late Mr. *Walſh*. This ſmall deviation might be well overlooked, was it only for its being a pious offering to the memory of his friend: But it may be farther juſtified as it was an homage paid in particular to the MORALS of the Critic, nothing being more amiable than the character here drawn of this excellent perſon. He being our Author's Judge and Cenſor, as well as Friend, it gives him a graceful opportunity to add *himſelf* to the number of the later Critics; and with a *character of himſelf*, ſuſtained by that *modeſty* and *dignity* which it is ſo difficult to make conſiſtent, this performance concludes.

Such late was Walſh—the Muſe's judge and friend,
Who juſtly knew to blame or to commend;
To failings mild, but zealous for deſert;
The cleareſt head, and the ſincereſt heart.
This humble praiſe, lamented Shade! receive,
This praiſe at leaſt a grateful Muſe may give:
The Muſe, whoſe early voice you taught to ſing,
Preſcrib'd her heights, and prun'd her tender wing,
(Her guide now loſt) no more attempts to riſe,
But in low numbers ſhort excurſions tries:
Content, if hence th' unlearn'd their wants may view,
The learn'd reflect on what before they knew:
Careleſs of cenſure, nor too fond of fame;
Still pleas'd to praiſe, yet not afraid to blame;
Averſe alike to flatter, or offend;
Not free from faults, nor yet too vain to mend.

COMMENTARY.

I have given a ſhort and plain account of the *Eſſay on Criticiſm*, concerning which I have but one thing more to acquaint the reader: That when he conſiders the Regularity of the plan, the maſterly Conduct of each part, the penetration into Nature, and the compaſs of Learning, ſo conſpicuous throughout, he ſhould at the ſame time know, it was the work of an Author who had not attained the twentieth year of his age.

FINIS.